

**Reminiscences**

**concerning**

**The Fathers and  
the Brothers**

**of the**

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

**Volume III**

**Necrologies of other**

**Early Stigmatine Apostolic Missionaries**

**[1874 -1883]**

**VERONA**

**Prem. Tipografia Vescovile P. Colombari**

**1886**

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### Dedication

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

Very Reverend Father,

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

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

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

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

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

Verona, September 24, 1886

Your most devoted and affectionate servant,  
Fr. Ferdinand Colombari

## Preface

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

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

Verona, from the Stimate, September 1, 1886.

The Priests of the Stimate

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## BRIEF REMARKS

### THE CONGREGATION OF APOSTOLIC MISSIONARIES: FOR THE ASSISTANCE OF BISHOPS

#### Its Origin – Difficulties – Nature and Scope

During the year 1810<sup>1</sup>, 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 Stigmata<sup>2</sup>. The property included all the area of our present House, as well as that of the Convent of St. Teresa<sup>3</sup>. The Church and the gardens had been offered to him by the Very Reverend Father Galvani<sup>4</sup>.

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

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<sup>1</sup> 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: [ ].

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> This was an old Monastery of Discalced Carmelites.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> This was part of a very ancient Convent and Abbey, founded in the 12<sup>th</sup> 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 school<sup>6</sup>.

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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 men<sup>7</sup>, 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

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<sup>6</sup> cf. The Biography of Fr. Bertoni written by Fr. Cajetan Giacobbe.

<sup>7</sup> cf. Fr. Giacobbe's Biography of Fr. Bertoni.

workmen. They assisted them in carrying the lime and bricks, and joined them in their fatigue. May their labors, on this holly ground protect it, sanctify it, and make it fructify!

At last, the building was furnished, the Church was opened and new Oratories were built, and the old ones were renovated. The thought behind it all was that an 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 <sup>8</sup>.

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

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<sup>8</sup> ib.

place over the door this inscription in large letters: *Here you can eat, drink and sleep!* However, it is hardly likely that Anyone one would have believed it.

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

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 be cause 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 intervned for them, and finally, their innocence was established, and they were set free<sup>9</sup>.

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

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<sup>9</sup> cf. The Life of Fr. Innocent Venturini, an early member of the Congregation.

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

The Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars examined the spirit of this new Congregation, the End to which it tends and the laws by which it is governed. On the 16<sup>th</sup> 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 30<sup>th</sup> 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 Obedience<sup>10</sup>.

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 admission<sup>11</sup>.

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.

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

<sup>11</sup> 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.

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

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

In Him, we have placed all our trust, and in the Holy Spouses, Mary and Joseph, the Patrons of our Congregation and we were not deluded. The legal justice of our case that was most evident, finally forced the government to propose a 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 4<sup>th</sup> 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*<sup>12</sup>, mentioned earlier in this historical sketch, merits a place of honor. In 1836, when Fr. Marani and Brother Zanoli were sent there by the Founder to take up residence, there was only a squalid dwelling. Even at that time, it was already old; there was also the dark and decaying Church. Concerning this Church, Fr. Marani had begun the construction of a new one, but the work was interrupted by the happenings of 1866. It was then completed by Fr. Lenotti in 1874. The House was most recently rebuilt and renovated for the use of the community, by the present Superior, Fr. Peter Vignola. The Fathers conduct there an **Oratory** on holy days, for boys. There is a **religious instruction** every night, and the priests are frequently called to **preach** in the parish church of St. Stephen's. **More than anything else, they hear confessions**, especially on the Vigils of the solemnities until about mid-night. They start right in again the next morning for about four more hours. In this work, after Fr. Marani others have been assigned, and have labored with great zeal, but Fr. Francis Benciolini merits a special mention.

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

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

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<sup>12</sup> This was formerly a place for accepting abandoned orphans.

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  
Fr. LOUIS BRAGATO  
Chapter 1  
Birth, Education and Life Prior to entering the Stimmate**

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

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

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

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

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

essence of patience and charity in receiving persons of every condition in the Tribunal of Penance. He continually preached the Word of God, in his homilies on the holy days, and through the informal exposition of Christian Doctrine. He also gave number less discourses and instructions to his beloved youth of the Marian Oratory.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

To begin this new endeavor, in the year 1826, Fr. Bragato opened his own home to three young students<sup>13</sup>. However, this foundation from which Fr. Bragato had hoped to be able to serve so much food for souls, never really got off the ground. His Benefactor, John Trevisani, just as he was about to sign a notarized statement for the support of a good number of students, for some unknown reason, decided to visit one of his country estates. Shortly after his arrival out there, he died very suddenly.

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<sup>13</sup> One of these was the future Arch-Priest of the Santissima Trinitá, Fr. Cajetan Giacobbe, who is still living. He wrote a eulogy for the month's mind Mass for Fr. Louis Bragato. We have a number of references to this Oration.

## Chapter 2

### Fr. Bragato at the Stimate

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

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

During the year 1830, Fr. Bragato was teaching in our school. A Sovereign Decree was published, obliging all Clerics in their curriculum of sacred studies, to include the study of methodology. No Priest who was to teach either in public or private school could be except from this. Fr. Bertoni was desirous that some of his Priests would fulfill this requirement. He asked Fr. Bragato if he would not mind enrolling in the class of Fr. Lepilla, who was teaching this course for the first time. Fr. Bragato did not have to be asked twice, and set out immediately for school. It was quite a sight to see him – this man who had one taught himself at the Seminary, and who had been Prefect of Studies there. Here he was, a Priest of about 40 years of age, much esteemed and venerated, mingling with the clerics of the student body, having returned to the Seminary as a humble student. Fr. Lapilla would never call on him without taking off his cap, and would manifest toward him that regard and reverend in which he held him.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

very short time won for him the esteem and affection of all. He even won over those who were unaccustomed to Catholic Courts, and who were much astonished at seeing for the first time a Priest in residence at the Court.

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

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

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

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

While on this subject of letters, we should also mention those that he would send in reply to anyone who had sought him out for spiritual counsel. Whether the mood of these letters was serious, or joyful, his dignity was always evident in them. He was a man well versed in spiritual matters. He also carried on a wide correspondence with close friends and relatives.

He sent many letters to Fr. Bertoni <sup>14</sup> whom he had always considered his superior and spiritual maser. For our consolation, we should note that his separation

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<sup>14</sup> It is too bad that so many of these writings were either lost, or spread throughout all of Europe, and even beyond it, and those written to Fr. Bertoni were destroyed in an unfortunate incident.

and most exalted status in no way diminished his affection toward our Venerable Founder and toward our Congregation to which he remained united in spirit.

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

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

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## Chapter 4 Monsignor Bragato at the Court of Prague

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

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

He discovered that the chapels in the Palace of Hradschin, and in the nearby Castle of Reichstadt had been abandoned. He received from his Sovereigns a commission that was both honorary and arduous. He was given the assignment of supervising their renovation. It was precisely here that his creative genius stood out. Previous to this opportunity, this talent had remained unobserved. He set about this undertaking, with an inspiration that was unique to him. He was given a *carte blanche*, for his work, and was assisted by Italian, German and Bohemian tradesmen. He inspired new life into their sculpturing, painting, sacred music and the other arts, within his sphere of influence. Very soon his labors were brought to a conclusion to the complete satisfaction of the pious Monarch who had entrusted this task to him.

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

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

After the material construction was completed, there followed a program of purchasing the sacred furnishings for them from the craft shops of Vienna, Milan, Lyons, Belgium and other places. Due to the ultimate perfection of church functions, especially in the Imperial Chapel of Prague, even though it was situated on a high mountain, the faithful flocked to it, from the most distant sectors of the city. They

came to hear the sermons, take part in the sacred exercises, to assist at Mass and for all the other services to their utmost edification.

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

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

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

In doing all this, there appeared in every clearer light the personal [133] disinterest and the integrity of the Priest. He was forgetful of himself, and convinced that it was better to give than to receive, as the Holy Gospel states. He experienced no greater pleasure than to bring joy to his neighbor. He accepted no stipend for the celebration of the divine mysteries, unless it was necessary. Even then, he did not keep the money for himself, but instead distributed these sums, together with other monies as well as alms he had received for this purpose. In those instances, when the appeals to the clemency of the Sovereigns passed the established limits, he sought to alleviate as many needs as he could from his own money, always giving preference to those who seemed the most needy.

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

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## **Chapter 5**

### **The Virtues of Monsignor Bragato**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## Chapter 5 His Death

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

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

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

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

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

The mortal remains of our Fr. Bragato rest in peace under a simple monument<sup>15</sup>. On it, almost as a guard, there is an angel with a trumpet on one side – and on the other, there is a Crown of Glory. These are symbols of the resurrection, and they are at the same time testimony to the merits of the deceased and our own hopes. There is also the following inscription:

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

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<sup>15</sup> The Abbot Negrelli, who knew and lived with Fr. Bragato for a long time, wrote some recollections concerning him, from which we have drawn the greater part of our material. He concludes, saying: On the marble stone that covers his remains, I would only inscribe the name of LOUIS BRAGATO, with the epigraphy previously published by the *VOCE CATTOLICA* of Trent: *He lived his life benefiting others, and he died poor.*

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

**Chapter 1  
His Birth through Ordination**

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

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

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

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

The prudent Priest lauded his excellent resolution, and exhorted him to continue in prayer. He advised him to apply himself with ever greater vigor to his studies. The boy had already given proof of both his diligence and his intelligence. He urged him to merit this grace by the ever more fervent exercise of the holy virtues, and especially with his edifying life at home. The young boy responded to these exhortations with an ever increasing spirit of piety. To obtain this grace, he turned with particular devotion to Mary, for whom he had a most tender devotion. He also [139] prayed to her most chaste Spouse, St. Joseph, and from them both, he hoped that the realization of his dream was near.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Just as this day was one of rejoicing for young John, and for the Priests of the Stimmate, I can say that it also was such a day for the Lenotti family. However, the

8<sup>th</sup> of May that same year, was an even more joyful occasion. It was the Feast of the Ascension.

On this day, young John was solemnly vested with the habit of the Congregation, by Monsignor Louis Castori, Vicar General of the Diocese. For the Vestition ceremony, in addition to his parents and friends, the Church was filled, and all were most edified and consoled. For the newly bested, however, and for his parents, family and uncles, this was an especially happy occasion.

When young Lenotti saw himself vested in the sacred habit, he resolved to correspond ever more to his divine vocation. Under the guidance of Fr. Gaspar Bertoni, a most holy and learned Priest, the boy made rapid progress in virtue and knowledge.

He studied Philosophy and Theology in the Diocesan Seminary, which he attended every day. He was accompanied by Fr. Raimondi, who was then another one of the Priests of the Stimmate, and also Professor of Church History in the same Seminary<sup>16</sup>. The young man applied himself to these studies with great energy. He soon stood out among his fellow students, as he was helped at home by the instructions of Fr. Bertoni, and his own diligent application. He later stated that Fr. Bertoni was an inspiration to him during those years.

As he pursued the course of theology<sup>17</sup>, Fr Bertoni was preparing him for Ordination. The fervor with which young Lenotti approached the sacred Order of the Sub-diaconate cannot be described [141]. He received this Order on September 18, 1841 and then the Diaconate on December of that same year. His spirit and a glimpse into his soul may be discerned when he learned that he would be ordained a Priest on the subsequent March 12<sup>th</sup> [of 1842].

In the Spiritual Exercises that preceded his ordination, he fortified his already fervent spirit and his zeal increased even more. This was evident in the assiduous, fervent and intelligent effort that he had given in the vineyard of the Lord. His Devotion to the sacred Heart of Jesus also received a new impulse. His Devotion to the Mother of God and St. Joseph seemed to take on new vigor and meaning. He recommended his spirit to Jesus, Mary and Joseph and also the new life that he was about to enter. During those days of Retreat, it seemed that he heard these words being addressed to him: 'John Lenotti, a long journey remains ahead for you!'

He completed this Retreat with a flame in his heart for Christ, full of zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. On the day after the completion of the Retreat, he was ordained.

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<sup>16</sup> Fr. Vincent Raimondi later left the Congregation in 1843. After a short time, he entered the Company of Jesus.

<sup>17</sup> cf. The *Compendium* of the Life of the Cleric Louis Ferrari [+ March 6, 1842].

Following the ceremony, he presented himself as a newly ordained Priest to his beloved Fr. Bertoni. He thanked him for this great part he had played in obtaining for him so outstanding a grace. The good Father then extended his congratulations, kissed his hands that had been so recently consecrated, and spoke to him briefly. He gave the young Priest a better understanding of his own humility. He inspired him to an ever more fervent spirit to grasp the new obligations of his sublime new state.

Young Fr. Lenotti had a good understanding of his lofty Mission. With joy in his heart, and with deep feeling, he offered his First Mass at the Stimate on March 12, 1842, just after the regular services for the Oratory were concluded. In addition to his parents, his family and friends, many young boys of the Oratory were present before the altar. All admired the modesty, the fervor and the piety of the newly ordained Priest who for the first time was offering to God the Host of Propitiation.

**[142]** This was truly a day of joy for the Fathers of the Stimate and for the parents of Fr. Lenotti. For him personally, it was a glimpse of Paradise. His great hopes had been fulfilled, and he had reached this goal for which he had so long aspired. He was now to give vent to his zeal, and his heart felt a strong need for this.

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## **Chapter 2** **From his First Mass, until** **his Election as Superior General of the Congregation**

The celebration of daily Mass was such a great consolation for this newly ordained Priest. He offered it each day with much devotion, modesty, recollection and exactness, which moved all who attended it. He persevered in this manner of offering Mass throughout his entire life.

It was also beautiful and edifying to see him recite the Holy Office, always with composure, attention and devotion. It was evident that he was entirely absorbed by the most holy action that he was performing.

While comforting his spirit with these devout practices, he also attended to his beloved studies. He reviewed all that he had learned, and perfected himself all the more in Sacred Theology, both Moral and Dogma. He reviewed Canon Law, and the study of the Church fathers. In these studies, he was still under the guidance of his most beloved Father and Teacher, Fr. Bertoni. He worked hard to profit by the wealth of knowledge and erudition with which even the common and ordinary conversations abounded.

However, because Fr. Lenotti's constitution was always somewhat delicate, shortly after his First Mass, he found himself quite run down. He was then forced to discontinue all studying, and was placed under the care of a doctor. Fr. Bertoni, in his sincere love for him, took every care to restore the health of the exhausted Priest.

Many prayers were offered for him, but it seemed that the Lord wished to prolong the trial of his faithful servant.

The doctor discovered that little progress was being made, even after some time had been given to his cure. He suggested that the young priest should return home for a while to see if a greater relaxation and the soothing climate of Bardolino where the Lenotti family had some possessions, might better aid his cure, and restore him sooner and more surely to health.

Fr. Lenotti found himself in a dilemma – he had a great love for the life, and he wanted to be ready soon to accomplish something in the vineyard of the Lord, to satisfy the urgings of his zeal. However, the state of his health left him in doubt.

The Founder let him return to his family, but that he would not assure him that he would be re-accepted. After having taken a leave of absence, and was restored to health, the door of the Stimate would not necessarily be still opened to him.

Fr. Lenotti accepted these words as his decision. Greatly encouraged, he assured the Founder that he would rather sacrifice his life than his vocation. He stated that he would think no more about the suggestion of the doctor, and that he would remain at the Stimate, and nowhere else, for the decision of Divine Providence, concerning himself.

Such a generous resolve was pleasing to God and also to Fr. Bertoni, who had such love for him. Fr. Bertoni, delighting in this decision, encouraged young Fr. Lenotti, and inspired him to total confidence in God. Meanwhile, his cure was continued and the prayers of the Founder and his Confreres were increased that this grace might be obtained. Fr. Lenotti never regretted the decision that he had made, and abandoned himself most confidently to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. He prayed for his own health, but would always add: ***However, not my will, O Lord, but Thine be done!***

It was soon apparent that God had heard his prayer. After about one year of suffering and anguish, and more trial, Fr. Lenotti began to feel stronger. Every day his hope of being restored to health by God was increased. Soon, he felt strong enough to take up again his studies a little at a time. Shortly afterward, he began to preach and to hear confessions. As this good recovery was maintained, he was then able to preach a few courses of the Spiritual Exercises, either to some of the Oratories, or to some Religious Institutes. During the summer, he was also sent to teach Catechism in a number of Churches.

He felt supreme gratitude in his heart for the benefits he had received from God, and through the intercession of his Patrons, Mary most Holy, and St. Joseph. After he had many times repeated his fervent thanksgiving, to satisfy his devotion and gratitude, with even greater intensity, he strove in his sermons and in the Tribunal of Penance, to instill into the hearts of all a love for Christ, for Mary Most

Holy and for St. Joseph. He took every opportunity to speak of them. He knew well how to inject confidence into afflicted hearts, so that all were quite consoled.

Now, at ease, Fr. Lenotti studied and worked in the vineyard of the Lord. Then, however, another trial besieged him – this was the death of his Guide, Teacher and Father, I mean to say, Fr. Bertoni, which occurred in the **15<sup>th</sup> [sic!/] of June 1853**. Fr. Lenotti was the youngest of the surviving sons of the Founder. As such, he had always been the object of his paternal care. Out of necessity, he had approached him even more than the others, and he enjoyed the warm exhortations and the continuous instructions he had received and treasured. His only comfort in this bitter loss would be that now his Father was in heaven.

The Very Reverend John Marani succeeded the deceased Venerable Founder. Fr. Marani, too, had a great love for Fr. Lenotti, and much evaluated his virtues and intelligence.

At this point, it seemed that the time had arrived to make the public aware of the Congregation of the Priests of the Stimmate. The Superior, Fr. Marani, with his prudence and activity, decided to make the Plan and the ideals of Fr. Bertoni better known. He gathered about himself some confreres, and made use of every means so that our Congregation could prosper even more.

The solicitous care of Fr. Marani was blessed by God. Very soon, the zealous Superior saw other Priests approach him, asking to be admitted into the Institute [145], which just then began to call itself **Apostolic Missionaries**. In addition to Priests, the Superior also received some young men to be trained for the Priesthood. Fr. Marani entrusted these to Fr. John Lenotti, that he might train them all in that spirit and that life that Fr. Bertoni had outlined.

The new Master of Novices threw himself body and soul into this most important assignment that had been thrust on him by obedience. He trusted even more on divine help; and in the assistance of Mary and Joseph, and he most happily dedicated himself to training the minds of these young men. For them, he was even more much like a much like a loving Mother, rather than a father. He instructed them, exhorted them, and inspired them to virtue, and was most patient and constant in exercising them in it. He wished them to be outstanding in obedience, in modest, in humility – and to this, he directed all his efforts and loving solicitude.

He did not, however, neglect the Priests, but always had time to give them the necessary instructions and good advice. He had set for them a daily schedule covering their entire day. Each one had his activities planned and coordinated. By his own example, he set the pace for them. He was most observant of the regular discipline, and his modesty was exemplary. His kindness was ingratiating, and his own humility was most edifying. Twice a week he practiced some act of public humiliation. If he was ever humbled by Fr. Marani in public, he would accept it with a smile, and thank his Superior for it.

God so blessed the work of the industrious cultivator, and these young shoots grew and increased. They gave much hope for the future.

Fr. Lenotti thanked God for it all, and was happy himself in seeing the vocations thrive. In future years, these men would do much in the mystical garden begun by Fr. Bertoni.

He was transferred with his Novices and some priests to the *Santissima Trinita'*, as Fr. Marani had prepared there a suitable place for the training of young men. He dedicated himself there all the more [146] to this work with the young Novices and Students, upon whom he lavished all his solicitude. He insisted that they be observant, studious, devout and he personally was so devoted to St. Joseph that he wished this devotion would become dear to them as well, and that it would be deeply ingrained on all the Novices.

During Recreation, he always used to read some brief passage in honor of the Saint from the periodical, *The Propagator of the Glories of St. Joseph*. In the garden of the *Trinitá*, he had a little image of the Saint set up under the branches of a mulberry tree. He did this so that the Novices and the Students might go there from time to time, as on a Pilgrimage. The day that this image was erected, there was a brief but devout and very pious function. The picture was carried in procession, in which the whole community took part. They all made their way through the garden and gathered around the tree. The image was then attached to it, and prayers were said. Then, a few hymns were sung to the great Patron. To be sure, it was a little service, but one that was undoubtedly very dear to St. Joseph. It was comforting as well as inspiring to all, especially to Fr. Lenotti, who exulted, blessed and prayed to St. Joseph for his beloved sons.

Fr. John Baptist Lenotti was very happy in this work with his beloved Novices and Students, who were corresponding well to his care. Then again, a bitter and harsh trial came to the Community. The political atmosphere made it necessary for the entire Student House to be uprooted.

Fr. Lenotti, Fr. DaPrato and Fr. Vincent Vignola, with all of the young students, were sent to the borrowed House in the outskirts of Trent. They were housed in the summer villa of His Highness, the Prince Bishop of Trent, Benedict Riccabona. He was always most affectionate toward our family. From this House, our foundation in Trent [1866] had its beginning.

The Director and Master of Novices was now Fr. DaPrato. Fr. Lenotti became Prefect of Studies, an office he fulfilled with the utmost diligence. His chief concern was that the students would always be inspired particularly with the thought of the greater glory of God. He did all he could to infuse into their young hearts a zeal for the salvation of souls. He wanted them to direct [147] their studies to these ends.

Because of his own great zeal, however, and because of the most ardent charity of his heart, he was never able to refuse anyone who asked him to help out, either hearing Confessions, or to give some courses of the Spiritual Exercises. Whenever his occupations made it possible, he also used to give Parish Missions in the little villages surrounding the Student House, with a companion. On such occasions, all his zeal, his virtue and his knowledge were most evident.

He was much in demand for preaching to Seminarians. His work always brought about the desired results, and this only increased his reputation in this apostolate. Many times he gave the annual Retreat, not only in Verona, but in Treviso, Belluno, Padua, Cremona, Vicenza and Trent. Everywhere he went, he was remembered as a holy and learned man. His modesty and gravity made him moved by all.

He was also invited to Convents to preach Retreats. His sermons were full of unction and comfort, and they would elevate any heart that was well disposed to an even greater love of God.

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**Chapter 3**  
**From his Election as Superior General until his Death**

During the month of June 1871, it was clear that Fr. Marani, the Superior General, after a long illness, had reached the end of his days. On the first of July, comforted by the Last Sacraments, he breathed forth his soul into the embrace of the Lord. He was full of merits, and was deeply mourned by his sons.

Fr. John Baptist Lenotti was immediately chosen Vicar, and then later, on October 6, 1871, he was definitively chosen as Superior General. With trepidation, he accepted the grave responsibility, but trusting in the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and in the assistance of Mary and Joseph, as was his life-long custom, he dedicated himself with all his vigor and with all the ardor of his zeal to strive for the greater glory of God, and the greater prosperity [148] of the Congregation. While he worked most diligently for its spiritual advantage, he did not neglect its material well-being. He spared nothing that was at his disposal that could be of assistance in the court case which Fr. Benciolini was then waging against the government. He prayed much that this would have a happy conclusion, and asked others to do likewise. This grace was finally received on May 27, 1873. By means of a compromise, Fr. Benciolini was to receive back from the government all of the confiscated possessions.

The Very Reverend Fr. Lenotti exulted with all his sons, and he manifested a complete appreciation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to his Holy Patrons, Mary and Joseph. He wrote a letter to make known this happy news, and in it he suggested:

**Let us place ourselves entirely at the disposal of the Heart of Jesus and Mary and under the mantle of Joseph.**

In 1873, he decided that the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus would be celebrated at the Stimate with due solemnity. He wished that this would be continued every year in the month of June. When he had received some special faculties, he enrolled many in the Apostleship of Prayer, with the accompanying obligation of perpetual devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. He showed in all this, a truly edifying zeal.

He brought to a conclusion the construction of the Church of *Santa Maria del Giglio* [at the *Dereletti*], that had been begun by his predecessor, Fr. Marani. In 1872, to promote even more the worship and devotion to St. Joseph, he had reprinted the *Manual* in the saint's honor. He was tireless in spreading the use of this booklet, and in recommending the Devotion.

In a feeling of gratitude, he took ever more to heart the interests of the Congregation, that had been so recently blessed by God. He had a piece of property purchased in Trent, and ordered that a suitable dwelling be constructed on it. His hope was to lodge his sons there who were still living outside the city in a rented House that they might live in less discomfort, and apply themselves for the good of their neighbor.

He would often visit these Houses, both in Verona and in Trent [149]. He watched over them with his solicitude that there might always flourish in them regular observance and discipline.

From the very first days of his administration, he entertained the thought of spreading the Congregation further, even to the **Foreign Missions**. Because of various circumstances, however, this never came to be. He brought to completion the negotiations for a foundation in Parma. He did not have the consolation, however, to see this totally realized. In the inscrutable decrees of the Lord, and in his adorable judgments, Fr. Lenotti's life as Superior was not to be a long one. He was to be called to heaven to be rewarded for the great good he had already done, and for his many virtues. After his great fatigue, he was to enjoy eternal rest.

God often prepares those souls who are especially loved by Him by long and cruel martyrdom. He thus purifies them from every danger and blemish. In this way, are they brought to complete happiness with Him after their deaths, in a much shorter time. In the beginning of his fourth year as Superior General, Fr. Lenotti began to be bothered by very severe headaches. The usual medical remedies proved fruitless to relive him of them. The poor man suffered intensely, but his patience and resignation were most edifying.

In July of 1875, the doctor suggested that he should go to Rabbi, to partake of the highly reputed waters there. He was hoping that these would prove most beneficial to him. About the middle of the month, he went there with one of his young Priests, who was also in poor health.

At first, he seemed to enjoy the waters there. However, during those 15 days, a torrential rain fell. Furthermore, the temperature remained quite raw. Due to this, and also other factors, he returned from Rabbi in even poorer health. He was confined to our House in Trent, and remained in bed for several days. The doctor came and found him to be in a pitiable state. After several days, he did get up from bed, but while eating, he suffered more and more from acute indigestion.

He stayed with the Community in Trent for about twenty days. When he could, he celebrated Mass, but when this was impossible, he would assist at another Priest's Mass. With each passing day, his condition worsened. It seems that he already had a presentiment of his approaching death. He felt exhausted in body, but in no way was [150] he discouraged in spirit. He found comfort in his meditations on the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius. During this period of time that he stayed in Trent, he was often seen with Belleccio's edition of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius in his hands.

A little after the middle of August, one of the Priests went up to Trent from Verona. His hope was to accompany the Superior back to Verona. It was felt now that the climate of the region of his birth, and even more the restful environment of Sezano, might be able to assist him greatly. His stomach disorder in no way diminished, and by now he was hardly able to keep any food down at all.

The Father Superior suffered all this most patiently. In his anxiety and exhaustion, he was heard to say many times: 'Blessed be God! May His holy will be done, and all that He wills, I, also will.' About the third or fourth day that was out at Sezano, he began to feel a little better. It was edifying to see him struggle to be up on time that he could at least assist at Holy Mass. He was no longer able to celebrate it, due to his advanced weakness.

Unfortunately, his initial improvement was not long lived. After about ten days at Sezano, he was visited by a doctor from Verona. It was decided during this visit that he should accompany the doctor back to Verona, as it was evident that his health had deteriorated to an alarming state. They arrived back at the Stimate in the evening, and Fr. Lenotti took to his bed, from which he was never to get up again.

His speech was now halting and it was a great effort for him to talk at all. However, despite his weakened and painful condition, his first thoughts as always, were of his sons. When anyone would come into to visit him, he showed a keen interest in the affairs of the House. When the students came in, he would bless each one before he left.

On the following day, the doctor in attendance decided to call in a well known specialist for consultation. Neither one of them now could give us any hope. The sick man was burning up with fever, and he was visibly a very weak man and worn out. There were periods when he seemed to be delirious. Finally, our Superior, Fr.

Lenotti, was reduced to such a state, that it was decided to give him the Last Sacraments. He went to Confession with edifying dispositions and at 9:45 p.m., Christ was brought to him in the Blessed Sacrament as Viaticum. While the Very Reverend Fr. Peter Vignola held the Sacred Host in his hand, our Father Superior in a weak voice managed to say these words:

**'First of all, I believe that there is only one God: I believe all that God has revealed, and that the Holy Catholic Church teaches: and I want always to be united to Pope Pius IXth. I ask pardon of God for my sins, and of you, my beloved brothers and sons, for the bad example I have given you: and I ask that you pray for me, that I might receive well the Holy Sacraments, and that I might attain the eternal reward, which is the only reason why we were created.**

He then received Holy Viaticum and deeply moved and edified all those who were present. When he had been blessed by this Sacrament, he laid back, entirely absorbed in recollection with the Sacrament of his love.

The following day was one of agony for him. Extreme Unction was administered, and he received it with sentiments of devotion. He then expressed his gratitude, as the reception of this Sacrament had deeply moved him. A few minutes later, one of the effects of this Sacrament were seen in him. It seemed as though there had an alleviation of his physical sufferings. He then fell off to a peaceful sleep.

After midnight, however, he began to fail more and more. He ranted and raved, and said that he could see the young aspirants passing by his bed, carrying flowers in their hands. The Brother assisting him placed before his eyes the images of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph. Fr. Lenotti kissed them all, while reciting devout ejaculations, and repeating the names of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

At 2:00 a.m., he asked them to call Fr. Peter Vignola, who was the Director of the Marian Oratory, and also Fr. Beltrami, his Confessor. When they arrived, he asked Fr. Vignola for the blessing to obtain the indulgences granted to those who were enrolled in the Marian Oratory. Fr. Peter Vignola assured him that he had been missing because he had been legitimately impeded. He [152] received the blessing and the indulgence with evident faith, gratitude and devotion. After this, he asked to be alone with his Confessor, to whom he often went due to the unusual delicacy of his conscience.

Fr. John Baptist Lenotti, even in his last agony, and pitifully reduced by so much suffering, continued to think about his sons. He had a special message for those Priests who were entrusted with the training of the students. Laying back on his bed, he told them:

Tell the young students to be most observant of their rules. Tell them to take care of their duties, and to do them well. Tell them to love our Lord and the Mother of God much, to be devoted to St. Joseph, and they will find happiness. Tell them to pray for me.

In this way, he passed the remainder of the night, and all of the following morning. By noon time, he seemed to be losing consciousness, but he still recognized voices. In the late afternoon, his hearing began to fade, but not completely. Whenever some ejaculations were suggested to him, he would repeat them in an intelligible voice and with much affection. At nightfall, just before the *Angelus*, His Excellency, Bishop di Canossa came to visit him, but Fr. Lenotti did not make any sign that he had recognized him.

Through the night, he was quite restless. For one moment, it seemed as though he had expired. He then awoke, and again asked for his Confessor. Leaning down closely to hear him, Fr. Beltrami repeated ejaculations, comforted him and suggested motives to him for his calm acceptance. He remained quiet, although suffering intensely, and his weakness was by now extreme.

At 10:00 a.m., Fr. Beltrami thought that his time had come, and began the prayers for a departing soul. The bell tolled solemnly, and announced to the assembled Oratory [as it was a Sunday] that the Superior, Fr. Lenotti, was in his last agony.

Before he expired, however, Monsignor Serego dropped in to visit him, but Fr. Lenotti did not recognize him. He remained in this quiet state until about 2:30 p.m. At that hour, with his Confessor at his bed side, our most beloved Superior rendered back to God [153] his beautiful soul. His hands were folded across his chest, and the Rosary was wrapped around his right hand. The images of our Lady and the sacred Heart were placed over his heart. He had gone to heaven to receive the reward merited by all his virtues and long years of hard work. It was exactly 2:30 in the afternoon - September 5, 1875 - which created a marvelous coincidence. It was the exact hour of the same day of the same month, in which 58 years earlier, he first saw the light of day.

Word of his death spread rapidly. Many in the city, and outside it, echoed the grief of his loving sons. It was heard many times that day: 'A holy and most zealous priest is dead!'

His funeral was held on the morning of the 7<sup>th</sup>. A large crowd turned out for both the Office of the Dead, and for the Mass of Requiem, which were sung for him. When the Mass was over, the reverend Pastor of the Most Holy trinity Parish, vested in a cope, led the procession from the Church of the Stimmate. The younger boys of the Oratory preceded the coffin with lighted candles and torches. A large group of Priests and Seminarians were also in the procession.

Following the coffin were his beloved sons, and other persons who had been close to him. When the procession reached the Parish Church, the final obsequies were sung. When these were over, the Very Reverend Pastor delivered a brief, but meaningful and moving eulogy. In it, he deplored the loss of so great and so worthy a

priest. He briefly touched on his rare characteristics, his virtues and his apostolic zeal. In brief, he proposed for consideration Fr. Lenotti's priestly life, as a true Apostolic **Missionary**.

The body was then brought to the cemetery, where the religious gathered. The last prayers were sung, and the entire group accompanied the body to the tomb of our Fathers and Brothers.

His memory will remain in benediction among all who knew him in life. So does he remain with us, as his virtues have been engraved deep within the hearts of us all.

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**[154]**

**Compendium  
of the Life of  
Fr. THOMAS VICENTINI**

The clock had just struck 11:00 a.m., on the 17<sup>th</sup> of October, 1875, the Feast of the Purity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Fr. Thomas Vicentini, fortified by all the comforts of Religion, and also those of religious charity, passed on to a better life. As he expired, one of the Priests was ascending the altar to offer a Mass in Suffrage for his soul. When the Mass had ended, the bells of the Stimate, and those of the Parish Church of the Most Holy Trinity, gave the triple funeral knell. We were all grieving, talking quietly about the last moments of our deceased Confrere, and about the edifying memories that he left us.

Fr. Thomas Vicentini was born in the Village of Zevio. His parents were Dominic Vicentini, and Mary Del-Fior. They were parents who communicated their own sense of religion and piety to their children. One of these had entered the holy Order of the Discalced Carmelites, and died as their Provincial. Two others were successively Pastors in the village of Bonferraro, in this Diocese. The fourth, named Thomas, who was the youngest, was a member of our Congregation.

From his earliest years, he gave every indication that he, too, had a vocation to the Priesthood. His good parents, to further his desires, sent him every day to school in Verona, from their village of San Massimo, where the family then lived. He made this walk every single day, even in the most difficult seasons. This was intended as a trial to test the firmness of his vocation.

**[155]** It was soon very evident that his vocation was genuine, and he was accepted as a member of the College of Acolytes in this city. The excellent young man dedicated himself with all earnestness to the acquisition of science and virtue. As he was endowed with a very jovial and candid temperament, he very soon won the affection of his Companions. So, too, his Superiors came to esteem and honor him to a great extent.

Therefore, even prior to the completion of his studies, and before reaching the canonical age, through a Dispensation, he was ordained to the Priesthood. His first years as a Priest, he was assigned to the Village of Boneferraro, where his brother, Fr. Alphonsus Vicentini, was Pastor.

Although he was much loved by his brother, and by the people there, he was not content. For some time, an interior voice seemed to be calling him to the Religious Life. His brother did not know of his plan, until about the time Fr. Thomas entered our congregation, on October 4, 1864.

Fr. Marani brought him to the Novitiate and introduced him simply, saying: 'Here is a Priest who wants to become an ***Apostolic Missionary!***' On the 126<sup>th</sup> of October 1864, the Feast of the Purity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, he was vested with the habit of the Congregation, and began his Novitiate. In the company of the Novices, who were much younger than himself, he mingled in with them with the simplicity of a child.

His obedience was of a rare type. He used to say: 'That devil always suggests to me in the morning to wait until the ***Angelus*** is said, before I get out of bed. He offers the protest that I will then say it with greater devotion. However, I send him on his way, and I get right up out of bed!'

He had a deep sense of devotion to the Mother of God. He used to speak of her often, and in such a way that he would inspire all who listened with love for her. His charity toward his Confreres was most outstanding. There was never any danger that anyone in his presence could criticize anyone else. At the first word that seemed even somewhat critical, he would say; 'Let's forget about it', and then he would do what he could to change the subject.

**[156]** By nature, Fr. Thomas was alien to any semblance of a contrast of opinion. As he deeply loved the study of Moral Theology and the Liturgy, very frequently cases relative to these matters were presented to him for a solution. He would then apply his knowledge to the case at hand. If his solution then gave rise to other opinions, he would back up his thoughts on the matter with strong reasons. If he then noted that his adversary was getting angry with the discussion, he would end it, by this sentence, which seems to have been as a principle with him: 'This was my opinion –if it is acceptable, then let it be so; if not, so be it.' He would not continue the argument further.

Mention should be made also of the great humility with which he would receive any humiliation or correction, both from his Companions, as well as from his Superiors. One day, Fr. Lenotti who was then the Novice Master, at the end of dinner, said: 'Fr. Thomas, kneel here in the middle of the Refectory. The good Priest promptly obeyed. Fr. Lenotti then gave him a correction, as earlier during that day, he had created a disturbance while going through the House looking for someone to go with him to the Stimmate so that he could say Mass. It seems that he was a little late. It was evident that Fr. Thomas was quite embarrassed because of his great confusion, but he listened with humility. He made no response, other than thanking the Novice Master for the correction; he asked pardon, and then for a penance.

There were many such anecdotes that we would recall here. The Superiors very soon recognized his virtue, and provided an occasion for even greater merit. They often publicly reprimanded him, and imposed on him humiliating penances. He accepted all of them, and when the storm had blown over, he would be as happy and content as he had been previously.

Upon the conclusion of his Novitiate, Fr. Thomas was initiated into the apostolate of the *Apostolic Missionaries*. He became quite proficient at giving the Spiritual Exercises and Retreats. However, he was really even more outstanding in explaining Christian Doctrine to the people, who would flock in large numbers to hear his instructions.

Unfortunately however, while he gave great hope for an abundant harvest in his apostolate, he was afflicted with a heart ailment. For five long years, this slowly sapped his strength, ever more [157] and more, even though all the remedies suggested by the field of medicine were applied. Because of this infirmity, he suffered much torment, especially from an almost continuous asthma, and a convulsive cough. The slightest effort soon became an extreme exertion for him. Even to go up one flight of stairs, he would have to stop every three or four steps to catch his breath, as it seemed that he was suffocating. When he would try to speak, he would cough violently.

Notwithstanding all his discomfort, he would call on every ounce of his strength to be able to ascend the altar steps each morning to celebrate Holy Mass. When he had concluded each day, then he would have to go back to his room, almost until the hour of dinner. This way of life, however, did not dishearten him, because as long as the doctor or the superior did not forbid him, he would celebrate Mass every day. He likewise exerted every effort to recite the Divine Office, at least in part, but would have to break it up to a great extent to lessen his fatigue.

His courage and resignation to God never waned, and he would enjoy conversations with his Confreres. Every once in a while, he would inject into the conversation a spirited comment that would make it quite lively. His interest would be enkindled when the conversation was about the Company of Jesus, for which he had a very high esteem. His interest would also pick up when the discussion turned on the incredulous and the liberals of our present era. Their activities, so hostile to the Church, and to Pope Pius IXth, wounded the depths of his heart, and enkindled in him a holy scorn.

One Sunday – for some reason or another – the Priest scheduled to give the sermon to the Oratory, did not appear. As a result, Fr. Thomas took his place and preached the Gospel of the day. His talk that Sunday was on the apparition of Christ to the Apostles, when St. Thomas was present and when he received the solemn reprimand for his lack of faith. Fr. Vicentini developed the theme, and applied it to the modern disbelief, that was rampant everywhere. He pointed out with great zeal how its poison infiltrates into the minds of those who read harmful periodicals.

He delivered another sermon that same day, in a nearby convent school. As he gave it that day after dinner, the added burden of the morning's sermon seemed to take its toll. Following the exertion of this [158] day, he had to remain in bed for three, or four days. This happened just after Easter in 1875.

None of these incidents could lessen his courage. On the following Sunday, he went right back to the same Convent School for his usual instruction on Christian Doctrine. He had been doing this for two years.

It was not until August 20<sup>th</sup> of that year 1875, that his strength gave out entirely. He was confined to bed, and was never able to leave it again. His ailment was caused in him frequently recurring fainting spells. These began to increase in intensity, and in duration. He suffered one of these on the 29<sup>th</sup> of that month, that made us all very apprehensive. Our Very Reverend Superior, Fr. Lenotti, of holy memory, was at this time out in Sezano, and he, too, was ailing. When he heard of the serious state of Fr. Thomas' health, he wanted to return at once to the city. He felt that he could thus give his assistance to Fr. Thomas in his last moments, if the danger of his dying seemed imminent. He did return to Verona on the first of September, hoping that his own health would improve. However, it had been decreed that the hour of his death would toll sooner than for Fr. Thomas. As we have seen, he passed away, with most edifying dispositions on the 5<sup>th</sup> day of that same month [of September].

In the meantime, fears for the death of Fr. Thomas in no way diminished. His ailment had already been declared as incurable, at least as far as total recovery was concerned. He was by now emaciated, and this left in us all a grave concern. Toward the end of September, the swelling that had been caused by his illness seemed to subside. The sick man seemed much better, and for a little while, there was hope that maybe he would be able to get up and around again.

Early in October, however, he suffered a serious attack of diarrhea, and nothing seemed to be able to keep it under control. It lasted for quite a few days, and soon there was hardly any flesh at all covering his bones. He, too, began to realize that with hastened steps, he was approaching the end of his days. He then asked himself for Holy Viaticum and Extreme Unction, and his desire was immediately gratified.

It would be most moving to recall here the piety and the internal joy with which the Lord overwhelmed his spirit.

**[159]** He said to us four days later:

'What a consolation it is to receive Viaticum, and the Holy Oil s! I did not ever imagine that I would find in the Last Sacraments such consolation!

Another time he said:

'I have often taught in Catechism classes what a great blessing it is to receive the sacraments at the end of one's life. Now, I have experienced it myself!

During the following days, he wanted to receive Holy Communion as often as he could, and his requests were satisfied. On the evening of the 11<sup>th</sup>, Holy Viaticum was administered to him for the second time. Before receiving the Sacred Host, he renewed his Profession and Declaration of Faith. He declared that he wanted to die as an obedient son of the Church. He then added:

And I ask pardon of all of you, for my bad example that I have given to you. Pray, my Brothers, for me!

He had always had this trait of asking pardon. There were times when his discomfort was at its height that he seemed to answer the Brothers assisting him, with impatience. Immediately following these outbursts, with humility, again and again, he would ask to be pardoned. He would say that his impatience was because of his illness.

Especially during his last week, his discomfort was extraordinary. He was hardly able to swallow two spoonfuls of medicine intended to alleviate him. He cried out in his agony: 'Stop, because I am suffocating!'

His prolonged dysentery reduced him to extreme weakness, so that he could no longer move by himself. In the midst of all this travail, he maintained an edifying resignation. Often he was heard to exclaim: 'May the will of God be done: Jesus Christ has suffered even more for me!'

Every day, he wanted to hear spiritual reading. He seemed happy when anyone spoke to him of God, of the vanity of the world and of the eternal goods of heaven. When anyone would ask how he was, his answer would be; 'Well enough – for heaven. Yes, in heaven, all is well!' The moment for his going was not very far away.

Then, the feast of the Blessed Mother dawned. A Brother came near his bed, and said to him: 'Father, have courage: today is the Feast of the Purity of the Blessed Mother...! **[160]** At these words, Fr. Thomas came to, and answered: 'The Purity of the Madonna – what a beautiful thing!' The Brother then added: 'You will see, Father, she will help you to suffer all of this with great resignation.' 'That is good!', he answered, 'I do trust in her!'

The Priest who was assisting him said to him: 'Are you glad that these prayers of the Church are being said?' He answered very emphatically that he was happy. When some of the prayers had been completed, he said: 'You can take off the surplice and stole: I do not think I will die so soon ... sit there!'

Then he began to run his fingers down over his nose, across his lips and over his closed eyes. He realized that there was sweat on his brow. He seemed to be checking to see if he had the customary signs of a dying man, and then he said: 'It seems that I do not...!'

There was a young Priest who was assisting him, and he kept repeating the same ejaculation: ***Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I give you my heart!***

Fr. Thomas then asked him: 'Do you always use the same one? You should vary it. You young fellows do not know how to assist the dying!'

Such was the mastery he had over his faculties even in these last moments. Shortly after saying this, he really entered his last agony, and the bell with its solemn tolling, spread the word.

Finally, with his eyes fixed on the Crucifix and the image of Mary, which he always wanted near him, he turned on his left side. He looked like he was just sleeping. At the words: '*...May the assembly of the Angels greet...*' - his half shut eyes rolled back. His mouth closed, and his breathing stopped. His soul had departed into the arms of his Heavenly Father. He had gone to receive a copious reward for his many and long sufferings.

He had lived 30 years in the world, and 11 in our Congregation. In all, he had remained on this earth for 41 years – and now he certainly lives in heaven.

[161]

**Compendium  
of the Life of  
Fr. LAWRENCE PIZZINI**

Villa Lagarina nestles at the foot of a high mountain in the Italian Tyrol. The little Village of Castellano stands near an ancient castle that was built around it, and from it most likely took its name. In this little town, Lawrence Pizzini was born on June 16, 1848. He was to be a man dearly beloved to all who came to know him.

Before he saw the light of day, his father died. Even before his birth, his Mother, a very fine woman, had remarried. Because of the iron will of her new husband, she was forced to abandon her new born son. He was left in the home of his Grandfather who was a man of great faith and character. The boy was then brought up in a Christian way by him.

Young Lawrence spent his early years by going to school in the winter, and in tending the flocks of his Grandfather, and those of the neighborhood during the other three seasons. It seemed that the boy was destined to spend his life among the herds, and on the farm, in the woods, and in the ravines.

However, Divine Providence had lovingly watched over the little orphan, and had other designs for him. In the year 1862, a Fr. Gasperini, a zealous Missionary, had seen the young shepherd and discovered that he was gifted with extraordinary talents. He then recommended him to Fr. John Mary Marani, who at that time was our Superior. He asked if he would be willing to accept the boy in his Congregation. In March of that year, Fr. Marani was visiting Trent, and the boy was presented to him. He briefly examined him and [162] approved of him, and brought him back to the Stimate.

There he immediately applied himself to the study of Latin. He overcame those difficulties which, in truth, are not insignificant, common to all young boys, when they make the big jump from the country schools to the study of the Latin language. As each day went by, he gave an ever clearer indication of his attachment for his religious vocation. This showed itself ever more firm, in that he had to overcome obstacles that were considerable.

A little more than a year after his entrance into Religion, the Feast of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, June 21<sup>st</sup>, he was vested in the habit of the Congregation by Monsignor Louis Bragato. He then began his Novitiate.

Much could be said here about his religious fervor, and his devotion to Mary, most holy. In her honor, even as a Priest, he never took wine on Saturdays. We could say much about his love for prayer, and for all the practices of piety. He found happiness during recreation in conversing with his companions about the Lord. There also could be mentioned the appreciation he showed to those who pointed out to him

his defects' he showed a genuine gratitude for this. He would tell his companions that he would pay them back with a *Hail Mary* any time they would point out a defect of his. Worthy of note, too, is the faithfulness with which almost every evening, he would go to his Spiritual Father, to review the events of his day, and the faults that he had committed.

There is one trait of his that merits our consideration. As a Novice, he stood out in this quality. He had a sincere enthusiasm for the décor of the House of God. The Royal Psalmist has written: ***I have loved, o Lord, the beauty of Your House, and the place where Your glory dwells.*** [Ps 24:8]. These words in all truth can well be applied to young Pizzini.

Because of his repeated requests, he obtained from the Superiors the permission of being made the Vice sacristan, and then later, sacristan of our Novitiate Chapel. By the express command of Fr. Marani, that floor had to be kept shining like a mirror. Young [163] was hardly able to make recreation any more. In those brief quarter hour periods, that were allowed after two hours of study, he would always go to his beloved Chapel. He was constantly cleaning, washing, polishing and shining. Although he was somewhat robust, many times he had worked with such ardor, that he would come out of the chapel, even in the dead of winter, covered with sweat, and completely exhausted.

Whenever one of our family solemnities occurred, he seemed to want to outdo himself in the care of his beloved Chapel. He spared no effort, and he worked with such contentment, that it seemed to be a challenge to him. He was most happy when his work was well done, and it was evident that his idea was that the appearance of the Chapel was to convey the thought of Paradise. He achieved this very well, and anyone who stepped inside the Chapel, was inspired with devotion, recollection and heavenly affections. He succeeded so well that he often merited the praise of Fr. Marani himself – and he rarely, if ever, gave praise for such things.

It should not be concluded that his affection for the House of God lasted only during his Novitiate. It lasted all throughout his student years, and even later as a Priest. He always had this holy enthusiasm. When he was made Sacristan at the Stimate, no matter how busy he may have been with other tasks, it was beautiful and edifying to see him, during every free moment that he had, going over to the Church to work. He often worked along-side the Brother sacristan and other times he would go there to plan what might be added to increase the decor of the House of God. Again, these words of the Psalmist could be applied to him: ***I have loved, O Lord, the beauty of Your House, and the Place where Your glory dwells!***

When his two years of Novitiate had been completed, he pronounced his Holy Vows on the Feast of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, June 21, 1865, with great happiness in his heart. He could never adequately describe the appreciation he had of these Vows. He had the custom of renewing them every day. He had an attachment and a truly filial affection for the Congregation. The Founder expected [164] this quality in

all his sons: ***They are to have much affection for this Congregation.*** His spirit of obedience was indescribable, especially in those things that were most repugnant to him. This is clearly seen in what we found among his resolutions that were written during the Spiritual Exercises of 1872:

'I will follow You, my Jesus, You are my King and Leader. Grant that I may the more securely follow You. I promise to adhere perfectly and joyfully to all the commands of my Superior.

In another place he wrote:

...***'what does it profit a man ...?*** If you now seek to do your own will, and then you lose your soul, what does it profit you? What does it profit a man? ... At death, to have learned and done much good, but not according to the Will of God? Therefore, I propose firmly to submit myself entirely to the will of my superiors, and thus I will avoid all illusion.

We will not mention all the qualities that he had. These we have mentioned would indicate to us quite clearly the great dedication he had to achieve his own perfection. Let us, though, pause here, to consider the characteristics of the life of Fr. Pizzini.

From the time that he was still a student, in addition to his zeal for the décor of the House of God, he was also most fervent in his affection for the spiritual temples of God. He had an ardor for the salvation of souls. His favorite conversations with his Companions centered on the Missions of Africa, India and America. During his studies, while preparing young children for Holy Communion, in teaching Christian Doctrine, in giving talks in the Church, or Oratory, and in his ordinary conversations, he would express his thoughts, with that persuasion and affability that were characteristic of him. These phases of the apostolate were in truth a diversion for him. As he hoped one day to go to the **Foreign Missions**, from his student days, he applied himself to the study of languages.

Before he was ordained, he knew French, Spanish, German and English so well that he was able to converse easily with anyone he might meet from any of these nations.

**[165]** He was ordained a Priest on March 31, 1875, and then his zeal knew no bounds. The Holy See proposed for our Congregation a Mission in Sweden. Fr. Pizzini was the first one to offer himself to his Superior, and he stated that he wanted to spend his entire life there. On the other hand, when it was pointed out what great good could be had at the Stimate through the schools, he was among the first to take the examinations to obtain the License to teach the upper grades of Elementary School. When the Superior was asked for a Priest to teach Catechism to the poor prisoners, Fr. Pizzini considered it as a real blessing that he was one of the first two chosen to go.

The need arose in the Diocese that whoever was teaching Christian Doctrine in the parishes of the city, would also have to give retreats, triduums, the Spiritual Exercises and the Parish Missions. Fr. Pizzini, being a most zealous worker, not only showed that he was ready, but also stated that he had a longing for such an apostolate. He set to work night and day to prepare himself. He was visibly most content whenever he was among the young members of the Oratory of Monteforte. He won them all over to himself, especially through his fervent talks to them. With his goodness and generous heart, he did a world of good among them, and always returned home jubilant. He had already begun his life as a Missionary.

One time he remarked most enthusiastically to one of his confreres: 'If you only knew what energy, what courage there can be felt when one had the Crucifix protecting his chest!'

My God! My God! How incomprehensible are your judgments! These were the sentiments of the young Missionary. He was already now wounded, but he did not want to give up the combat. Although he was indisposed, he went off to Desenzano to give the Spiritual Exercises there to the young boys of that College. This was to be the last of his apostolic labors. When he returned to the House, he was confined to bed. Even though his sickness was diagnosed right away as serious, there was not thought of him not being saved. To the great consolation of his confreres, he was cured, almost miraculously. He completely recovered and was able to leave the House once again, to the contentment of all who knew him. It seemed that there was no longer anything to fear.

**[166]** During the month of June 1876, plans had been made for the solemn observance of the Feast of the sacred Heart of Jesus. Fr. Pizzini, as Sacristan, had worked himself up into a lather of sweat. He suffered a kind of collapse, and very soon his condition gave cause for concern. He suffered a relapse into the illness from which he had but recently recovered. The doctors forbade him to say his Breviary. On hearing this news, he pleaded: 'Prohibit me from all the other prayers, but please let me say my Breviary!'

To recuperate, he was sent to our House in Trent. Unfortunately, all remedies proved fruitless. The illness continued on its relentless course, and in a few days, he was in mortal danger. The Last sacraments were administered to him. He expressed his resignation to the Will of God, and he made the offering of his life to Him.

Surrounded by his grieving confreres, he rendered his soul up to God, on the 12<sup>th</sup> day of August of that same year, 1876. It was a Saturday, consecrated to Mary most holly, to whom he had been most devoted all through his life.

O generous soul! You have suffered agony for the salvation of your neighbor, for whom you would willingly have given your life. The Lord was satisfied with your willingness to go, and thus called you from this valley of tears to the joy of Paradise,

at the young age of 28: ***Be prepared, because at an hour you do not think, the Son of Man will come!*** [Jn 12:40].

†††

Compendium  
of the Life of the Coadjutor Brother  
**JOHN B. SALBEGO**

He was a strong young man from Laverda, the Diocese of Padua, in the Province of Vicenza. At the age of 24, he entered the Stimmate, aflame with the desire of serving God. How many proofs of patience and constancy did he give in overcoming the many [167] obstacles that stood in the way of his vocation. Finally, in November 1876, he pronounced his Holy Vows and began to live the delightful peace that the Lord sooner or later bestows on anyone who places his hopes in Him. He showed continual good will, and he was a tireless worker. However, he contracted military fever, and in a few days, he was brought to his tomb. He died, as do those who have loved the Lord, on April 9, 1877.

†††

Compendium  
of the Life of the Professed Student  
**JOSEPH NICOLINI**

He was a young man from Villazzano, near Trent. He had a strong constitution, sufficient intelligence and good will, and he even surpassed the hopes that were held out for him. He sincerely loved the religious life, and he was most intent in overcoming every difficulty. These qualities can be seen from the following passage of a letter that he wrote in confidence to a fellow religious:

The good fortune that has finally come to me is truly beautiful, and worthy of the congratulations of others. I rejoice that we are now even more closely and more fraternally united, with those most sweet chains that are now common to both of us. The times that preceded this happy even in my life were truly sad, troubled and afflicted. At that time, I prayed: 'O Lord! If You want me in Your House, why do You abandon me? Why do You not lighten these travails of mine?

I then prayed: 'But, pardon me, O Lord, I did not recognize in these tribulations Your paternal hand. You visited me early in the day and put me to the test. Pardon me, if all this was necessary to make me pleasing to You. [168] Here I am, Lord, do with me whatever pleases you the most. Even if You grind me, as is grain; even if You must hammer me, as is the iron; even if You must put me to the fire, as is bronze – here I am, ready for anything. Do with me whatever is pleasing to You.

Such were his thoughts, and in them he found comfort:

And as I hoped to bring in Him my left hand, it was followed also by the right. 'His left hand is under my head, and His right hand shall embrace me.' How quickly it seemed to me that those days passed! The flight of an eagle to his post does not seem as swift. A coach does not pass as swiftly as those dark days fled far from me. Now I am happy and I live content in the possession of the lot I desired. Now I am all His, He Who has led me in so extraordinary a way to safety. I belong to Jesus, and I always will. In Him I trust I will always remain attached to Him, and I will not tremble at the assaults of the evil one.

I am in the House of the Lord; I dwell in that garden, surrounded by a wall of the finest silver. Here breathes a pleasant and fresh air. In brief, it all seems like a Paradise. It is not, however, but it is a Prelude of it. If this life, which seems to me like a Paradise, but it is not, what can the real Paradise be like? Oh! How great will be the contentment and the peace which reigns in the true Paradise, if these are so great here in this valley of tears? ... Nor is that day for which I long so distant, when I will pass from this earthy paradise to that heavenly one. Let us pray that God gives us all the grace to be together there one day.

From these lines of his writings, it would seem that he had a presentiment of his approaching death.

His Companions noted in him an extraordinary recollection and enthusiasm for prayer. Every day, after school, rather than spending the time in recreation, he used to go to visit the Blessed Sacrament. In general, he manifested a disgust for the things of this earth. He was in the Third Year of Theology, and had already received Minor Orders. He became ill with miliary fever, and received the Last Sacraments. After a few days, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 1879, he peacefully rendered his soul to God, at the House of San Bernardino, in Trent. He was 22 years of age.

His remains are interred in that city.

†††

[169]

**Compendium  
of the Life of the Novice Brother,  
ANDREW TRAPIN**

He was born in Mezzotedesco, in the Trentine, the son of Joseph Trapin and Teresa Hauser. He came to the vineyard of the Lord somewhat late, beginning his Novitiate when he was 44 years of age. During the second year of it, he fell mortally ill. He was granted the privilege of pronouncing his Holy Vows. Comforted by all the

benefits of religion, he passed from this life on April 8, 1879. He was a man who spoke little, and worked much. He seemed always joyful and devout, and was most diligent, evening the most menial tasks.

May God give him glory.

†††

**Compendium  
of the Life of the Novice Coadjutor Brother  
ANTHONY RIGATTINI**

He was a young man, endowed with a meek and quiet nature. He worked as a tailor, and was fully content in being able to serve God in His holy House. After being a Novice for only three months, during the night of June 25, 1880, he became seriously ill at St. Teresa's. His labored breathing had awakened the Brother in the adjoining room, who summoned the Spiritual Father. He received Sacramental Absolution, and after a few minutes of agony, he expired. He was 25 years of age.

†††

Compendium  
of the Life of  
Fr. CHARLES ZARA

The memory of Josias, says Sacred Scripture, is like a composition of various odors, blended by a perfumer: ***The memory of Josias has been made into a composition of odors, the work of a perfumer*** [Si 49:1]. We can apply these words to our own Fr. Charles Zara, whose life we are to recount briefly here.

Fr. Zara was born in Verona, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of July, 1843, of Nicholas Zara and Louise Bonzanini. They were extraordinarily pious parents. From his earliest years, he directed his mind toward the knowledge of God. From that early period, he consecrated to God the virginal beats of his heart. He had a most lively temperament, but he was guided in all things by obedience. With his family, he was docile and loving, and at school he was a good example to all. Because of his unusual diligence, as well as because of his alert mind and his powerful memory, he was among the few to crown his scholastic year by winning an award.

In those years, he was more interested in the things of God than he was in games, even though usually at his age, boys are more avid for the latter. He often read devout books, and also made a little altar in his home. He took an active part in the Oratory, and in the Doctrine Classes. He used to assist at the sacred functions, served Masses and dedicated himself to similar practices of piety. We can also apply to him the words written of the pious King Osias: ***When he was still a boy, he began to seek God.***

These were the first clear signs of that sublime vocation to which he [171] would one day be called by God. From his childhood, he had informed his parents that his desire was to consecrate himself entirely to God, that he might work out better his own sanctification, and to bring about the salvation of souls. He asked the Lord for this grace every day, and also offered his meditation on the Most Holy Virgin for this end. From his boyhood days, he was always most devoted to her. His prayers were not long in being heard.

On the 127<sup>th</sup> of February 1856, when he had not yet reached his 13<sup>th</sup> birthday, to his great joy, he was received into our little Congregation. The boy experienced an unspeakable joy in being taken out of the world even before he had come to know of it.

With great fervor, from those first days, he girded himself for the struggle to attain the religious virtues and the necessary knowledge. He made such progress that a little more than a month after his entrance, he was vested with the religious habit. When he had reached the minimum prescribed by the sacred canons, he began his Novitiate and then pronounced his Holy Vows.

However, not much later, in the year 1860, the 17<sup>th</sup> of his life, he came down with a very grave illness. He really never recovered from this, and for the rest of his life, he bore the effects of this malady within him. As a result, we all remember well the doctor saying that for as long as he lived, he would have to pace himself to conserve his strength. It was always a great wonder to all of us that he was able to continue his useful existence as long as he did, despite so much suffering, so much fatigue and exertion. He allowed himself to endure all of this because of his unflinching zeal. The love for God and for his neighbor that burned so ardent joy in his heart fed the flickering flame of his life that many times seemed to be on the verge of going out.

***Love God and your neighbor!*** - this sums up the life of the entire mortal pilgrimage of Fr. Charles. This became even more [172] evident from the time of his Ordination. He became a Priest on March 16, 1867. He loved God, and he applied himself to cultivate and increase this love with the most beautiful practices of piety.

Each year, as Christmas approached, even though because of his delicate constitution, he was most susceptible to the rigors of winter, he worked for days on end to prepare the crib. Even months before the Feast, he would begin to prepare the devout program that was to be given during the evenings of the Christmas Season, in honor of the God Who became a Child for us.

He also nurtured a tender love for the sorrowful mysteries of the life of Christ. We all recall that from the time there was introduced into our Church of the Stimmate the pious exercise of the Seven Last Words on Friday, the sermon in honor of Christ crucified was reserved for him every year. Through these talks of his he was able to move even the coldest and most disinterested hearts.

Because our Fr. Charles loved God so fervently, he likewise had a most tender and warm affection for the great Mother of God, Mary most holy. In a particular manner, he nourished a great affection for her sorrows, and he did all in his power to enkindle this in the hearts of others. It was due to him that in our Church there was erected an altar in honor of the Sorrowful Virgin. The piety and fervor with which that Queen of Sorrows is honored there, is also due to him. Every year, he would open and close the Sorrowful Month with one of his moving and inspired sermons. These would penetrate hearts and inundate them with sincere love.

Because of this same love for God of his, especially after he had become Director at the Stimmate, that the Temple of the Lord was maintained with such décor that it inspired devotion in anyone who visited it.

The love for God, however, does not remain inactive in the hearts of His servants. Of necessity, it impels them to honor their neighbor by trying to lead him out of sin, or to preserve him from it, and to inspire him to the practice of the Christian virtues. Fr. Charles thirsted for the salvation of souls. To understand how great this zeal of his truly was, it would be enough to cite the following expressions of his zeal

that was truly apostolic. These words were taken from the text of a letter that he wrote a few months before he died from a villa where he had gone under obedience:

This is for me the last word in comforts: to do good for souls. What good is anything else? For one hour of fatigue in behalf of souls. I would exchange all the country-side of this world. It is true, as I have been reading during these days, that in the evening of life, the soul finds itself most content when it can say: Today, too, I did some good for my brethren. This is the best medicine that anyone could take. How I hope that the Lord will not refuse my meager efforts that I am able to offer Him for His souls.

This gives a good idea of what he was like. From these words we can see that Fr. Charles was on fire with zeal for the salvation of souls. Because of this zeal, shortly after his ordination, he worked with tireless effort to prepare various types of sermons that are used during Missions. However, because of his chronic weak and unstable health, which was then abused and mistreated by such suffering and discomfort, he was not assigned to deliver these sermons. Nonetheless, in preparing them, he was able to find a way to satisfy his zeal.

More than anything else, he worked and labored for the good of the youth, especially of the Oratory at the Stimmate. From the time he became its Director, we can say that his thoughts were always centered on this Oratory. He worked constantly for the good of his boys, with the industry of a father, and with the tenderness of a mother. If there was any means that would help to maintain, or to increase the welfare of the Oratory, he would put his hand to it and would overcome every difficulty.

Although by temperament, he was not much for diversions, nonetheless, to attract the young boys to join the Oratory, he would take part in their recreations. Even though he was sometimes worn out by his fatigue and continual sickness among the boys, he was [174] full of spirit and life. He was so active and agile, that he seemed to be in the best of health. It was his desire for the good of their souls that sustained and reinforced him.

It was not, however, only to his own Oratory that he confined his zeal. He extended it to the majority of the Oratories of the city. The courses of the Spiritual Exercises that he gave, as well as the Retreats, not only to the Oratories, but also to the Religious Institutes during his last years, can be said to be without number.

We should also say something about his diligence in the Confessional. Very early every morning, through every season, he was always the first to be up out of bed. Many times, even before the *Angelus*, he would celebrate Holy Mass, so that he could take his place in the Confessional where he would remain until about noon every day. After dinner, and often without taking even a brief rest, he used to go to hear the Confessions of the Sisters. From there, he would return again to his own Confessional in our Church until nightfall.

It is not possible to estimate the number of troubled souls that he was able to lead back to God. Those who were wavering, he confirmed in truth; the tepid, he inspired; the fervent, he directed to an even more perfect life. He would encourage them to turn their backs on the world, to consecrate themselves to God in the State of Religion. The good that he did through his Confessional is a mystery even to us. Only in heaven will it be given to know it clearly, and to admire it. For now, we can only say that the good he did was extraordinarily abundant and precious before God. This is how he lived for many years.

His fatigue, however, placed a drain on his precarious health. There were other discomforts from which he had been suffering for many years, that brought about a terrible malady. For about a year, he was subjected to the purifying fire of suffering that was most cruel, atrocious and tormenting. Even just recalling it, one cannot help shuddering on the one hand – but, on the other, we are overwhelmed in amazement for the truly heroic patience and resignation with which he suffered everything.

His sickness was a cause of anguish for the many who loved him for all they received from him. There was great anxiety, many prayers, Holy Communion, Triduums and Novenas, and so many hopes ... that it would not be easy to note them all. Even though many felt that they still had need of such a father, God decreed otherwise, and decided that Fr. Charles was not to live much longer on this earth. However, to enrich him with even greater merits, and that he might gain the crown of martyrdom, He willed that Fr. Zara would be tormented for almost a full year, with agonizing sufferings. As time passed, it was believed that every week, or even every day, and hour – might be the last of his life.

At the end, fully conscious, he received Viaticum and Extreme Unction with the sentiments of a saint, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of June 1883. After a few more hours of the most painful agony, during which he lapsed into unconsciousness, at 9:00 p.m., he peacefully fell asleep in the Lord. The Members of the Marian Oratory of the Stimate had the following epigraph printed:

To Charles Zara, Priest of the Apostolic Missionaries, because of his admirable zeal, abnegation and gentleness, he was more a loving Father, than a Director of the Marian Oratory of the Sacred Stigmata. He died on the 20<sup>th</sup> of June 1883, at about the age of 40, no stranger to suffering, full of merits and mourned by everyone, but even more by us, the sons of his heart, to whom he left an incorruptible heredity of word and example.

The Confreres of the Marian Oratory,  
Celebrating the Solemn Month's Mind Mass, Sunday, July 22<sup>nd</sup>.

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