

Brief Biographical Sketches

Volume I

Two Brothers

Fr. Peter Vignola,

Superior General,

and his Brother,

Fr. Vincent Vignola

of the

**Congregation of the Priests
of the Sacred Stigmata
of Our Lord Jesus Christ**

VERONA

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[1st Centenary of the Congregation]

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of the Life of

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3rd Superior General**

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Compendium

of the Life of His Brother,

Fr. Vincent Vignola

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Preface

The first centenary of the foundation of the Congregation is to be celebrated with as much solemnity as possible. The Congregation was founded on November 4, 1816, when Venerable Gaspar Bertoni entered the Stimate, with his first Companions. As a commemoration of this event, it was decided to gather Recollections of our Fathers and Brothers, who have died after 1886. The Reminiscences of our deceased confreres before this date, were already published on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of the Superior General, Fr. Peter Vignola, of venerated memory.

The [First World] War, however, has discouraged any exterior celebration of this event. Moreover, it has called to arms a number of those assigned to gather these reminiscences. Therefore, they have been unable to present them in time for publication.

Only the under-signed, who is most advanced in years, being the oldest member of the Congregation and the most unoccupied, has been able to fulfill this assignment. He was given the task of compiling the reminiscences of Fr. Peter Vignola, his predecessor in the Office of Superior General; of Fr. Vincent Vignola, his Master of Novices; and of Fr. Joseph Marchesini¹, his Prefect.

All three of these men were most dear to the complier – all three were native Veronese – and all three were contemporaries of our Venerable Founder. Since the others were unable to fulfill their task, the undersigned is happy to publish the biographical sketches of at least these three men. He believes that their lives can be held up as models of the Christian and Religious Life, and which, only with difficulty, could ever be surpassed.

May God grant, through the intercession of His Most Holy Mother, that this small and poorly arranged booklet, might contribute something to enkindle in us, during the centenary celebration of the Congregation, that spirit of our Venerable Founder. This spirit is in the hopes of each and every one, and the object of the efforts of us all.

From the Stimate, November 4, 1916

Fr. Pio Gurisatti

¹ Fr. Marchesini is the subject matter of Volume 2 in this series.

A
Compendium
of the Life
of
Fr. Peter Vignola,
3rd Superior General

Chapter 1 The Vignola Family

The Vignola family can very well be called a patriarchal family. The old homestead was in St. Stephen's Parish in Verona, on the street that leads to the Church of the *Madonna del Terraglio*. The family is patriarchal, not only because of the simple, affable and gentle characteristics of all its members, but above all, because of the spirit of piety and religion in which each one of them was distinguished. The members of this family gave genuine edification to the poor families, a great number of whom lived in the Vignola neighborhood.

To be persuaded even further concerning this family, two facts should be recalled here. Three sisters of the head of this family had entered Religion. They were, however, driven from their Convents at the time of the suppression of the Monasteries, carried out by Napoleon I. Another outstanding fact was that of the Vignola sons born to these blessed parents, five of them were ordained Priests. Fr. Vincent, who was the last ordained, recalled on the day he sang his First Mass, that there were all five brothers on the altar. This was indeed an unusual occurrence – in fact, it was more than rare, it was unique.

The oldest of the sons was Fr. Peter. Here we will give only a very brief biographical sketch. This could serve for the edification of all, and at the same time, to honor and revere this faultless and apostolic priest. The memory of him will move our hearts, [6] and will regenerate them with a flood of holy thoughts. He was a Priest who loved and was beloved in God, and through God. He was a Priest who was always docile and receptive to the inspirations that came to him from on high. He responded always to the fervent and binding exhortation of the Apostle: ***I exhort you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you were called*** [Ep 4:1].

In this first Chapter, I wanted to give some idea of the incomparable family of Fr. Peter. It seems to me that this brings honor and glory also to him: ***The glory of children are their fathers*** [Pr 17:6].

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Chapter 2 His Birth and Early Education

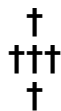
Peter Vignola was born on the first day of the year 1812. His parents were John Baptist Vignola, and Lucia Fiorani. At that time, the family was living in the Cathedral Parish, and then later moved to the house in St. Stephen's Parish, where it still may be found. On the day of his birth, he was also baptized. This home in which he was born, served as a stepping stone to the Priesthood. In that home a Christian atmosphere pervaded the family life. The young boy's simple soul was permeated with a profusion of graces, and the ineffable delights of the faith. This grace and faith have an effect on a man, even before he is brought forth to the light of day, through the sacred contacts with the soul and heart of his Mother. One day, God will have us understand how much we owe to our good Mothers. How many prayers have they sighed for us, and how many tears have they shed for us in their piety!

A good Mother was the first grace that the Lord bestowed on Peter Vignola. She trained him from his earliest years to be docile, obedient, devoted, modest and dedicated to prayer. He was taught to frequent the Church, the classes of Christian Doctrine, the Sacraments and all sacred things. How will the child correspond to these efforts of his Mother!

[7] As a boy, he set up a little altar in his home, and there with his brothers, would carry out their own sacred services. This, for them, was a great diversion. The good Mother observed all this, harbored in her heart, as did her husband, the highest hopes for the future of her sons.

However, she was taken from them when Peter was 14 years of age. He thus baptized with his tears the dawn of his adolescence. The young boy did not feel that his Mother was gone forever. In his heart, he wept for her death, but at the same time, he believed she was in Paradise – he cried for her absence, but yet felt her presence. He would look toward the heavens, as though to follow her blessed journey. Her voice seemed still be coming to him, and reinforced the lessons that she had taught him. She seemed to speak to him from her grave, and from the sky.

The childhood of Peter Vignola was spent in blissful ignorance of all that brings bitterness, and that fill the ears of one's spirit with noisy enchantments. It was not hard for him to hear, nor difficult for him to follow the angel of good counsel, calling him to the Priesthood. His entire family, and those who knew him, were just waiting for this day. As had his Mother, they, too nourished the highest hopes for him. Considering his consistency, modesty and piety, as well as his retiring manner, they would ask one another in the words applied to St. John, the Baptist: ***What, then, will this child be?*** [Lk 1:66].



Chapter 3 His Holy Vocation

He was a boy endowed with an excellent temperament, a firm intelligence, good and sound judgment. What is more, there was a goodness about him, and an evident holiness of life. All those signs that are generally considered as sure indications of a vocation to the Priesthood, appeared in young Vignola so clearly and evidently, that they provided an adequate response to the question: ***What will this child be?***

In a special manner, the fiber of his nature was so serene and candid, and the customary practices of his family marvelously lent themselves [8] to the mysteries of grace. Grace always makes use of nature, and perfects it. Souls of this type do not experience tempests. The flesh and ties of blood have little effect on them. There reigns in them a solemn and pensive quiet, that produces reflection and ecstasy. They do not fear, but they are watchful – they do not doubt, but they adore - they do not ask, they await.

However, in some cases, before one manifests his intention of consecrating himself to God, he must spend long and difficult weeks in recurring uncertainties and dismaying indecision. There are others, perhaps, more fortunate, who announce this intention with the simplicity of an unexpected statement, almost as though they were not even serious. Peter Vignola was one of these.

He had just completed with honor, the four years of High School, and the two years of Rhetoric in the Imperial Royal Lyceum. After spending the summer vacation in the family home in Avesa, he was coming back into the city with his brother, Louis, to begin the study of Philosophy. When they passed through St. George's Gate, they reached the stone bridge. Louis turned to follow the road to the right, leading to the High School, but Peter stopped, and called out to his brother: 'So long - I am going to the Seminary!'

At these words, Louis stopped, and followed his brother with his eyes, and no doubt with his thoughts. Perhaps very soon, Louis would follow in the path his brother was now treading alone. At that moment, he had a strong desire to follow his brother. He would do so in fact one day, and would be the second Vignola son, among the five to become a Priest.

Perhaps a little anecdote will seem of no value to some. In my judgment, though, it does indicate one of the most lovable aspect of Peter Vignola's temperament. It gives us some idea of the promptness, joy and abandonment with which he would obey down through the years, the divine invitations to evangelical perfection.

From his first days in the Seminary, he dedicated himself to the attainment of knowledge. He knew that this was so necessary for him to render himself an apt instrument to work one day for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. The

thought that he was studying for God, was to him as a sharp spur to carry out with the greatest possible diligence his scholastic duties. This soon became [9] known to his Superiors. They noted the advance he was making in his studies, as well as his progress in the exercise of the virtues. Shortly afterwards, he was vested in the ecclesiastical habit. He put it on for the first time, to his great happiness, in St. Stephen's Church.

His companions in the Seminary have retained among their most cherished memories the example of Peter Vignola as a Seminarian. In the exercises of piety and study, he stood out among all the others, and was a source of encouragement and comfort. Their close contact and familiarity while conferring a mutual confidence, did not in the least lessen their respect for one another. This brought them close together, despite differences in age and social condition. When the spirit of Christ blesses a thought and consecrates an affection, it infuses as well a drop of that marvelous balm that preserves the from the inevitable frailty of human realities.

The sublimity of the priestly ministry toward which he had directed his steps, was the sole motive for his actions. He kept his eyes riveted on that venerable summit, and always nourished his hopes by it. He was much impressed with the statement of St. Augustine, that a young man from the moment he becomes a Cleric, his is obliged to perfect holiness. Young Vignola was continually spurred to the acquisition of this holiness from the habit he wore, as well as from the state for which he had been chosen.

Moreover, he was most mindful of the fact that as a Priest, in addition to his own sanctification, he would also have to work for the salvation of others. From his Seminary days, he felt the ardent flame of zeal for his neighbor. In a special manner, he dedicated himself especially on holy days, to work among the youth, in supervising them, and instructing them in Christian Doctrine.

Two years after he had been vested, he was assigned by his Superiors to teach out at St. George's, which at that time was a mission church. However, he never forgot his Parish Church, that always remained most dear to him. There he also instructed the young children for the solemn general disputations in doctrine. In this field of preparing the young boys and girls for these disputes, he manifested an unusual ability.

He had a special inclination to work in the Oratories. The [10] providential [10] institution, precisely at that time, through the efforts of Ven. Gaspar Bertoni, were just beginning in the city. It was in 1836, in fact, that Fr. Gaspar began sending his sons to work in the Oratory of St. Stephen's Parish. Their activity gave birth to what can be called the second Stigmatine House in Verona.

Venerable Madeline di Canossa was caring for the education and instruction of young girls in two of the poorer and more abandoned parishes of the city – San Zeno's and St. Stephen's. Fr. Bertoni did the same for young boys in the two extremities of Verona, on both sides of the Adige. As a Seminarian, Peter Vignola

worked with our first Fathers for the good of the youth of his home Parish. He gave the highest hopes of what he would one day do in the Apostolate among the young, when he entered our Congregation.

All this time of intense activity, he was disposing himself and preparing himself for Ordination.



Chapter 4 His Ordination to the Priesthood

During the month of September 1836, Bishop Grasser, of sacred memory, conferred the Priesthood on Peter Vignola. The contentment of his pious soul on the day of his First Mass cannot be described.

The Bishop, who knew him very well, chose him right away as his Secretary. Although he was still very young, the Bishop entrusted much to him, in carrying out the most sublime and delicate matters. However, Fr. Peter felt very ill at ease in that office. The many and diverse occupations and difficulties that are so often tedious and material, were a painful restraint on his zeal. He wanted so much to work in a less confining and more extensive field of the apostolate. Hence, it must have been for him [11] a happy day when he was assigned to the Diocesan Seminary. He was named Assistant to the Rector, the austere and pious Fr. Bacilieri.

Young Fr. Vignola could very well be numbered among those who in the words of the Holy Spirit **are commended for the gift of discipline** [Ws 7:14] Who was more qualified for the post of Vice Rector than he? Certainly by his example, even before his words, he would teach the young candidates for the Priesthood what they had to do to succeed in their holy vocation.

In the words of the Prophet: **Teach me goodness and discipline and knowledge...** [Ps 118: 66] – he prayed to God. He would repeat this same prayer many times in behalf of those souls Providence had entrusted to him.

What a marvelous reality! Every apostolate that aspired in divine pride to bring light and love to souls, almost always begins with the education of youth. The ancient wise men have left memorable and serious statements in this regard: ‘The upright education of youth,’ says Plato, ‘of all the public duties is the most important; it is the supreme duty of the Magistrates.’ Aristotle adds: ‘The first and principal care must be education. When this is lacking, of necessity, the state will perish.’

There are even added reasons for the importance of education. The Divine Restorer of all things wished to live for a time as a child, and he, being God, humbled himself and became an infant. He exhorted His disciples, as adults, to look after the

youth – He told them to be as children in order to win over the youth to themselves. From all this, is derived a love that surpasses all love, and a paternity that has no rival. It has become the strongest and most terrible plan to combat the evil of men and times. **There is no one, who from it, will not recall the glory of our early Confreres, and who would not hope for better times in the future².**

² Translator's Note: Fr. Gurisatati has captured well a consistent ideal lodged for many years in the heart of Fr. Peter: here is a Proposal of the House Chapter of the Stimmate, dated Feb. 1874:

Having assembled at the invitation of Fr. Director, those having a vote among the Apostolic Missionaries at the House of the Stimmate in Verona, to express in Chapter, that which they would desire to be discussed in the Gen. Congregation, that is to be held in the very near future. These Rev. Fathers were present:

- . Peter Vignola, Director ²
- . Joseph Marchesini
- . Charles Zara
- . Thomas Vicentini
- . Louis Morando
- . Peter Beltrami
- . Lawrence Pizzini
- . Lawrence Rigatti

Having invoked divine assistance, the Director explained the reason for the meeting, and he invited those attending, in the order of their seniority, to propose whatever in the Lord, they believed expedient to propose to the Gen. Congregation, for the greater glory of God, for the development of the Congregation, and for the greater profit of its members.

When various proposals had been discussed and formulated, and put to a secret vote, the three following resulted as the ones to be presented to the Gen. Congregation:

1. The Congregation is asked to review the Rules for the special offices of the individual Superiors, for the purpose of avoiding the danger of conflicts.

2. It is asked to open an Elementary, and a High School. If this should not be presently possible, it is asked to look into the possibility of opening at least a High School, for the purpose of:

[1st] corresponding to one of the principal ends of our Congregation, that was born and flourished with teaching²;

[2nd] corresponding to the desires of the public, which in the present circumstances, is asking for this;

[3rd] avoiding scandal, in having such a large building, without any scope of public benefit – furthermore, because of the statement of our Holy Father, Pius IXth: *For the instruction of the youth, go to any extreme, save sin!*

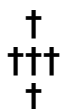
3. There is expressed the earnest desire that a greater number of Aspirants might be accepted.

This meeting was adjourned, and all affixed their signatures.

Fr. Peter Vignola, Director
Fr. Joseph Marchesini
Fr. Charles Zara

Fr. Peter spent ten years in the office of Vice Rector. As he himself said it seemed to him like ten days. It would be necessary to have some idea of our Seminary to understand the work it involves. Hence, those assigned there must be endowed with a spirit of sacrifice, necessary for the fulfillment of that office. They [12] have the responsibility of all that pertains to the exterior discipline, not only of the major seminarians, but also of the young boys in the last two classes.

The Vice Rector was very much imbued with this spirit of sacrifice. He was always ready to see those who sought him out. He watched over them, both day and night. He made himself all things to all of them, and never showed himself to be bored with them. He was always charitable, and never seemed to change. He avoided distinctions of every kind, and was beloved to all of them, as he loved them all in our Lord, Jesus Christ. Can there be any wonder with this attitude that the years in truth passed as days?



Chapter 5 Rector of St. Peter's in Monastero

Fr. Vignola was an extremely busy man. From the bosom of this, our land, a land of faith and martyrdom, a land of song and tears, there came forth the shout of liberty, as we all know. As a wind through the trees, it indicated the coming storm. When the two supreme loves of time and eternity were united under the holy name of Pius, Italy conquered – when they were dispersed, Italy lodged was conquered. The sectarian desire of unity rendered inefficacious the just desire of independence. In place of another Legnano, there was had Novara!

The heart of Fr. Vignola was not unmoved by the sufferings of his humiliated Fatherland; however, this traditionally had been the home of the Gospel. As well as giving birth to courage, it was also the homeland of Saints. Whatever anyone may think was his motive, for choosing to leave the Seminary in 1848, it would seem vain to seek for it elsewhere than in his conviction that he was no longer useful for it. He

Fr. Thomas Vicentini
Fr. Louis Morando
Fr. Peter Beltrami
Fr. Lawrence Pizzini
Fr. Lawrence Rigatti

This was received today, and placed among the *Acts*, Feb. 25, 1874.
Fr. John Rigoni, Secret.

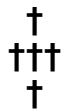
was chosen by that great light of the Veronese Church, Bishop Aurelius Mutti, as Rector of St. Peter's in Monastero. Shortly thereafter, there came the Imperial royal Decree approving his assignment.

Fr. Peter remained at this Church for only four years. These years, however, were sufficient for all to come to know his ardent zeal for the good of souls. So that it will not be stated here, what will be said below concerning his zeal for the care of souls, I will only note here [13] that as Rector of that Church, in limiting his apostolate to that area marked out for him by Canon Law, and the orders of his Superiors, he was a most valid assistant to his Pastor. He rendered him invaluable services, employing every possible means for this end. There was never the least shadow of jealous rivalry, or childish reprisals that darkened this sector of the Lord's vineyard.

He was guided to do all things by his prudence and by his refined and just judgment, which were his natural qualities. There was, however, one unfortunate episode, that we will mention here. During his Rectorship, it seems that the unfortunate Priest, Fr. Cajetan Trezza, was either assigned to the Church, or certainly frequented it. As measured and prudent as Fr. Peter was, he once expressed serious misgiving about Fr. Trezza's future. This Priest, from his earliest years, manifested a lack of balance, and was vain and proud in matters pertaining to the ministry, especially preaching.

When Fr. Peter heard him preach on the occasion of some solemnity, he expressed himself as believing that this was a Priest who did not seek God and souls, but himself. Fr. Vignola said he personally was quite concerned about the Priest's future. Event were to prove that Fr. Peter had not just incorrectly. The unfortunate Fr. Trezza afterwards lost his vocation, and his faith as well. He was defrocked, and became an apostate from our holy religion.

All this while, Fr. Peter was winning the esteem of the laity and his Superiors. He was soon judged suited to occupy a position of even greater importance, as will be seen in the next Chapter.



Chapter 6 Arch-Priest of St. Firmus Major

Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity, outside of serving God and serving only Him. [Qo 1:2]. These are the words of the Holy Spirit, as well as those of the golden book of the ***Imitation of Christ***, which teaches: *It is vanity to long for honors, and to seek honorable and high positions.* [Book I, chapter 4]. These maxims were deeply impressed on the mind and heart of Fr. Peter as will be seen from what is to follow.

For some time, a Bishop had been occupying the throne of St. Zeno, to whom would very well be applied the words of St. Augustine, inscribed in his *Book of Confessions*. Originally these words were written concerning St. Ambrose: *I began to love him, not as a Doctor of the Truth, but as a man who was most kind to me.* I have in mind here Bishop Benedict de Riccabona. By his gentle temperament and even his physical appearance, he was much like Fr. Vignola.

One day, much out of character, the Bishop went up the stairs of his Residence, deeply troubled and concerned. He came down again about an hour later, and seemed totally preoccupied with a thought that was causing him anguish and travail. From his residence, he went directly to the Cathedral, and there before the altar of the *Madonna del Popolo*, he prayed and wept profusely.

Shortly after this incident, the Parish of St. Firmus Major, still in tears because of the death of that Angelic Pastor, Fr. Pompei, was consoled by the appointment of Fr. Peter Vignola. The reception accorded him was joyful and cordial, most worthy of him and the parish, of the God of the People and of the People of God.

That happy day, however, passed swiftly, as do all joyous occasions. When the light had been turned off, and the signing died away, with the darkness came the concerns of the Parish. While his parishioners slept soundly, as is customary, when there is genuine happiness. The Pastor, however, was not able to sleep much that night. The dawn brought him his commitment before God. The hour had struck to set out on his task. The hour for sacrifice had come, the hour to work for the salvation of souls. The Redemption carried out on the Cross, continues to descend on generations that pass before it. With the cry of the Apostle Paul: ***The world is crucified to me, and I to the world!*** [Ga 6:14]. Fr. Vignola accepted that portion of souls that the Lord has entrusted to him. With a heart full of inexpressible charity, he took them to himself as something sacred, and something that was his own.

[15] Who, though, can say to a soul, or to many souls: 'You are mine?' The possessive pronouns 'mine', and 'yours' have left many sad pages in the history of peoples. The patriarch of Greece and Rome said to the poor slaves: 'You are mine!' A tyrant once said to all the nations of Europe: 'this land is mine, and you are mine, sons of this land!'

A Holy Father once called these two words: 'mine' and 'yours' cold. These words affirm the right of ownership, and they render legal any and all hardships, no matter how arduous they may be. They do not create that relationship which they mean to imply. The most often indicate egoism, which is an even worse vice.

Who, then, may say to a soul, or to many souls, 'You are mine?' God who has created them can say it, as can Christ, who has redeemed them, at the cost of His Blood. So, too,. Can they say it who are the cooperators with Christ and who with Him sacrifice themselves for souls, repeating the words of the Apostle: ***For free though I was to all, unto all I have made myself a slave, that I might gain the more converts*** [1 Co 9:19].

When a soul is loved in this way, or when many souls are so loved, it very well may be said to them: 'You are mine.' The reason is because first that has been said to them: 'I am yours!' This was the first greeting that the new Arch-Priest gave to those souls, who were awaiting him.

It is not easy after so many years to give a minute and precise account of his pastoral efforts. It is well known that the life of a good Pastor must be spent entirely in a series of occupations. These are almost the same, and they are always aimed at nourishing a portion of the flock of Christ. This is brought about through the truths preached in the words of the Apostles, sealed with the blood of Martyrs, defended with the wisdom of Doctors. The life of a Pastor has a perfect counter-part with that of a father of a family. He must be simple, hard working and beloved to his people, and faithful to the Church. It is nourished day by day, with silent sacrifices, unnoticed charities, and quiet tears, under the eyes of God, and out of view of the world. There is nothing in a Pastor's life that is extraordinary or outstanding.

Furthermore, in the midst of the most ordinary things, these [16] must not be confused with those that are mediocre or common; love is needed more than eloquence, and this brings the joy of light and true greatness. His love can be the occasion and the cause of prudent new ventures, and devout forward thinking.

St. Bernard has put this well in a few words: *Do the ordinary things, but not in an ordinary way.* This wise motto of St. Bernard gave to the zealous Pastor, Fr. Peter, the inspiration and a norm to comply faithfully with the duties of his ministry. You would have had to see him, and his spirit of recollection as he ascended the steps of the altar to offer there the Immaculate Lamb, for himself and for the salvation of the world. You would have had to hear him, with his holy words of mercy, as he sought to bind up the terrible wounds that the sons of the Old Adam inflicted upon themselves and others: *Do the ordinary things, but not in an ordinary way.*

There is nothing more proper, or believed to the basic nature of such a mission than to care for the harsh and tremendous necessities of the poor and afflicted. It requires the artful discovery of the hovels of shameful need, to discern the most jealously guarded sorrows. A Pastor must be as a prodigal parent to some, while being to others the angel of consolation. He must bestow his help with humble and reverent affection, which is really what is expected of the recipient of his kindness. He must manifest a fraternal participation in their sufferings, which is a property of the Charity of Christ: ***Who is weak, and I am not weak?*** [2 Co 11:29]. Such a life is a magnificent fulfillment of doing *the ordinary things, but not in an ordinary way.*

It is impossible to count the number of Instructions, or Homilies Fr. Vignola delivered as Arch-Priest to his people, without marveling at the loving and patient efforts he employed in compiling them. What pains-taking care, what a spirit of piety and what evangelical unction can be seen in this work of his, that are most evident in those neatly written note-books of his.

Prayer, which is the marvelous bond between heaven and earth is for the Priest a question of spiritual life and death. However, to spend long hours, kneeling on the bare floor, with arms outstretched and eyes streaming with tears before the tabernacle, or at the feet of the beloved Immaculate Virgin, praying for himself, his children and especially for those whom he felt he had lost ... this is to do *the ordinary things, but not in the ordinary way.*

[17] There is to be added to all this his many wise provisions to re-ignite among the children and the adults a love for the school of Christian Doctrine and the Oratory. Equally worthy of mention is the zealous care he employed to renovate and strengthen the old and venerable Church. Furthermore, the many priestly virtues of that soul that were manifest in his not being satisfied with the good he had already accomplished. His heart and mind were aflame with projects of an ever wider scope. In Fr. Vignola, there was the genuine image of the good Pastor.

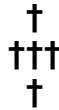
There can be no wonder, then, that his Superiors entrusted to him the most delicate tasks and duties. Among these, was his appointment as the Defender of the Bond in the marriage cases that were before the Ecclesiastical Tribunal, that had been instituted between the Austrian Empire and the Holy See. There were times when the validity of marriage was in question, and he would defend the various cases with such force and clarity that these marriages were saved. The civil authorities, too, soon recognized and appreciated his talents. He was named a member of the Commission of Public Benefices.

During his four years as Pastor at St. Firmus Major, the extraordinary and solemn commemorations in honor of the Virgin Mary were a great comfort to him. These were held to celebrate the Solemn Definition of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception, that was promulgated at this time. In that year, the solemn procession that the citizens since November 26, 1511, decided would be observed every year, was held. Its purpose was to commemorate their deliverance from a plague three centuries previously, and each year the event was commemorated. The miraculous statue of Mary Immaculate was carried from St. Firmus' to the Cathedral. After services held in the Cathedral, it was returned to St. Firmus in a triumphant procession.

I cannot close this Chapter without recalling more in particular the beautiful endeavors fulfilled in these years by the Arch-Priest, Fr. Vignola. First, there should be mentioned his repairing the roof, and his renovation of the interior of the Church. We should not overlook his part in restoring the classical *bas-reliefs* of the monument *Della Torre*, which Napoleon I had carried away to Paris. They had been exhibited in the Louvre Museum, from which a metal replica was made. He also restored other ancient frescoes.

All of this is in addition to other undertakings that are omitted here for the sake of brevity. It was inevitable that the esteem in which Fr. Vignola was held would grow among his parishioners and the citizens of Verona.

The affection for his person was never in the thought, or aspirations of the good Arch-Priest. All this while, in his own mind, the thought of renouncing the world, his Parish and all that he could hope for, was forming in his mind. He then made the decision to join the Congregation at the Stimmate



Chapter 7 Fr. Peter, Stigmatine

When a Priest, under the Patronage of the Blood of Redemption, celebrates his Spiritual Nuptials with souls, he reflects in his heart and says: 'I will stay with you until death.' However, all souls and concerns about them are in the hands of God. When He says: 'Come!'. It is necessary to do so, and when he says: 'Depart!', this, too, is necessary. On close examination, the People of Christ, or as the People of Israel before them, have their origin and life in those historical, and simultaneously prophetic words addressed to Abraham: ***Go forth out of your country, and from your kindred, and out of your father's house, and come into the land which I will show you.*** [Gn 12:1]

In those days, there flourished a religious society, that had the name of the **Priests of the Stimmate**. They were well known for their apostolic holiness of life, and their example of heroic virtue of austere virtue. Fr. Gaspar Bertoni, one of the most brilliant gems of the Veronese Church, had established it on humility. From this foundation, it was to ascend to the most brilliant heights of Christian love. Between these two extremes of humility and sublimity, he placed abnegation and detachment of all those things that are passing.

On January 20, 1859, Fr. Peter met his brother, Paul, walking along the street. At this time, Monsignor Paul Vignola was the Arch-Deacon and Canon of the Cathedral. Fr. Peter said to him: 'Here, take this as a little remembrance ... I do not need it any more.' Fr. Peter handed to his brother his Arch-Priest's ring. Fr. Paul was quite astonished, because he did not [19] know of his brother's decision.

That very evening, a humble priest hurried along the street, all wrapped in his cape, toward the house of those holy penitents. He knocked at the door and asked for his brother, Fr. Vincent, who for some time had been a member of the Community there. Fr. Marani, who was the Superior of the Stigmatines, already had been informed of Fr. Peter's decision, and went to call Fr. Vincent. He told him simply that his brother, the Arch-Priest, Fr. Peter, was waiting at the door and wanted to speak to him. Fr. Vincent went right away, and greeted him, and conversed with him briefly. He then got up to take his leave.

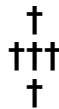
‘Wait a minute’, Fr. Peter said, ‘I am going to stay here in your company – I, too, am going to be a Stigmatine.’

At first, Fr. Vincent thought he was joking, but soon realized that all had been decided. He embraced his brother fraternally, and with great happiness led him into the cloister. He introduced him to Fr. Marani, and the other Fathers who had gathered around. He said: ‘Here is my brother – from now on, he is my Brother in a two-fold manner!’

The Pastor of St. Firmus, after four years in the ministry as Pastor, was once again, just ‘Fr. Peter.’ He was 47 years of age, and it was truly edifying to see him make his two years of Novitiate in the company of young Novices. He manifested humility, dependence and docility, and truly seemed to be one of them.

When these two years had passed, on the Feast of the Purification, Fr. Peter bound himself perpetually to God with the Vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience.

Fr. Peter was to spend 32 years in the House of the Stigmatine. Without exaggeration, it can be said that he spent them entirely in the sanctification of himself, and in doing good to souls.



Chapter 8 His Religious Life

We have said that the life of Fr. Peter at the Stigmatine was spent from the first until his last day, in his sanctification, and [20] that of others. Primarily, he attended to his own perfection through the practice of the Christian and religious virtues. I will treat here only of his principal virtues.

There was in him a very profound Faith, and a great attachment to the Holy Church and the Roman Pontiff. His Faith appeared even externally in his manner of praying, celebrating Mass and in the services he conducted. He performed all of these duties with composure, gravity and devotion.

His attachment to the Roman Pontiff was such that whenever he might have expressed an opinion regarding matters not yet defined, as soon as he heard that the Pope had spoken about them, even implicitly, he changed his view.

Many of his penitents could attest to the nature of the great Hope that moved him. Many doubting and scrupulous souls had been inspired and comforted by entrusting themselves completely to Divine Mercy, and to hope always in God.

His Charity toward God and toward his neighbor were likewise most ardent. The many endeavors he undertook for the Glory of God and for the good of his neighbor bear eloquent testimony to this.

What, then, can be said of his other moral and cardinal virtues? His sense of Prudence, even as a young man, was recognized in the various assignments he held, as Secretary to the Bishop, as Vice Rector of the Seminary and as Pastor of Sts. Firmus and Rusticus. This was especially evident in the direction he gave to souls, even to those in a very high station. He was also a prudent Spiritual Director to many religious societies. He manifested this virtue in many other, varied apostolates, that were confidently entrusted to him by our Bishops.

Regarding his Temperance, it is sufficient to recall his spirit of mortification and poverty, that were always outstanding in him. He had a great love for common life, and would not tolerate the least exception, or dispensation in his regard. Surely, in his somewhat advanced age, when he entered Religion, with the habits he acquired, both in his comfortable family home, as well as in his own Rectory, he must have felt [21] some needs. However, at the Stimate, both as regards the quality and the quantity of the food, a stern diet was observed.

At supper time, for example, there was served a plate of beans and only a quarter of a liter of wine. Of this, he would only drink but one glass. Rather than complaining about the food, he seemed most content with it. He used to say that he was in such good health, that all the nourishment of the food must have been going directly to his blood!

The facts seem to substantiate this. Previously, he had been somewhat thin, and seemed sickly. Shortly after he entered the Stimate, however, his color improved and he looked like a man with a most robust and health constitution. He did not need much rest – during the summer, he used to get up at 4:30 a.m., and at 5:00 a.m. during the winter. He was usually the first one to celebrate Mass.

With this manner of life, and with the exercise of these and other virtues, Fr. Peter worked for his won perfection.

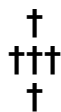
I have also said that he was much dedicated to the sanctification of others. In his every contact with souls, he worked for their improvement, throughout his entire life that he lived at the Stimate.

Just about this time, Fr. Charles Fedelini died. He had been teaching Moral Theology at the Seminary for many years. Fr. Vignola was then assigned by his Superior to succeed him on the Seminary Faculty. He remained at this assignment for a number of years, and was known for his precise order and practical wisdom. He exerted every effort in teaching, because to him, this was a way of doing good to souls.

Whatever time he had free from his teaching chores, he dedicated to hearing Confessions. People from all walks of life flocked to his Confessional. He also preached the Spiritual Exercises many times in various localities to the Clergy and to Religious Communities. Even more frequently, though, he gave Parish Missions. He gave much of his time to the Marian Oratory, and for a number of years, he was its Director. He was also very dedicated to teaching Catechism, and to explaining Christian Doctrine. In the beginning, he attended to those duties in the various parishes of the city, and then later, at the Institute of St. Sylvester. He continued teaching the youth of this Institute for many years, right up to the last hour of his life.

He had an extraordinary enthusiasm for doing good to souls, which is the most sublime and lofty endeavor. This is the sole passion [22] worthy of a man of God. Throughout his entire life, this drove Fr. Vignola in all of his many and arduous undertakings. This was, so to speak, his first and last breath.

An inexhaustible source of goodness seemed to breathe from his priestly character. He was a man of genuine and tender kindness, that easily drew hearts to his own. He was to all a true friend, a brother and a father. A learned and zealous Arch-Priest, who later became a Canon, said of him: 'Whenever anyone went to him, he would soon know of the love of Fr. Peter; he would be loved by all who sought him out.' This says a great deal, because here on earth there is nothing better than to love and beloved. Truly he was simply 'Fr. Peter.' This was not merely an extrinsic, or formal title. When the people put these two words together, they expressed the very nature of the man and his affection for them. This was Fr. Peter. By calling him by this name, there was implied a bond of spiritual friendship, and there was the echo of long lines of favors he had bestowed. It was the sound of happy memories as well as future hopes. To all, the name of Fr. Peter said so very much. His name was to them the summary of a life entirely spent in his own sanctification.



Chapter 9 Superior General

In September of 1875, Fr. John Baptist Lenotti, of holy memory, breathed his last. The few priests that comprised the General Chapter elected Fr. Peter to succeed him. During Fr. Lenotti's administration, as Superior General, Fr. Peter had held the post of General Councilor, and that of the Director of the House of the Stimate. For the next 16 years, that is, for one half of his life spent at the Stimate, he was to govern our Congregation. He ruled it with an inspired, meek and patient zeal. Since the endeavors fulfilled by him were too many and so significant, we cannot dispense ourselves from at least referring to his more noteworthy achievements.

[23] Certainly, his most outstanding accomplishment, for which we owe him eternal gratitude, was the Approbation of our Congregation by the Holy See. Sixty years had passed since its foundation, at the time of his Election. Because of the small number of the members of the Congregation, all that had been obtained in that time was a Decree of Praise from the Supreme Pontiff, Pius IX. The Pope himself expressed the wish that the 'Little Flock would grow!' This had to be a reality before the definitive approbation could be granted to it.

The number of Venerable Gaspar Bertoni's sons had increased somewhat, but the many difficulties and various obstacles left much to be desired. The rules, left by the Founder, were not yet entirely adjusted. The part pertaining to the government of our Congregation was judged to be deficient, in that the Constitutions were not in conformity with the new norms of the Holy See that were required before approbation was granted to the new Institute.

There was also an element that, sad to say, prevented him from carrying this out. There was almost an open war, and many accusations were leveled at him. What saddened his paternal heart the most was to see the defection of some of his Priests, who could not adapt themselves to those proposals of changes in the rules, which the Sacred Congregation demanded before the granting the requested approbation.

It seemed that the Lord permitted all this in His Providence, to bring more clearly to the fore, Fr. Vignola's truly illumined understand, his meekness and his exemplary patience. You would have had to see how kindly he treated those who opposed him, the charity with which he would defend them. He would attribute all he suffered to difficult temperaments, or characteristics of those who were in opposition to him, or their lack of a full knowledge of the circumstances. Notwithstanding these, and much more mortification and bitterness to which he was subject, and to which we have only alluded here, he overcame this difficult period. He finally succeeded in obtaining the long-awaited Decree of Approbation, and the entire Congregation rejoiced.

Another accomplishment of his, which was also significant, was to **re-open the Schools of the Stimate, that had been originally established by the Venerable Founder long before.** They were closed in 1844, because the Jesuit Fathers in that year opened a High School at St. Sebastian's. Because of the evils of those times, this Jesuit School alter was also closed. For a long time thereafter, Verona lacked any Parochial School that for so many years had done so much good for the poor children.

In 1874, Fr. Lenotti and his Council felt that by re-opening at least the Elementary School at the Stimate, much good would be obtained. It was decided to send some of the Priests to Padua to prepare for the examinations to receive accreditation as teachers. The following year, however, Fr. Lenotti died, before being able to see this project succeed.

One of the first thoughts of his successor, Fr. Vignola, was to re-open not only what had been planned by Fr. Lenotti, but also to add the elementary grades, then those of the high school level, and also those of the lyceum. With this plan in mind, Fr. Vignola set about to renovate and to furnish the buildings. Even more so, did he make provision for the Priests who were to obtain the required diplomas for teaching in the future high school and lyceum. The expense, effort and sacrifices he endured, as well as the laborious planning, were unbelievable. With the help of one who was experienced in these matters, Fr. Vignola, in a very short time, was able to overcome all the difficulties, and set the program in operation.

Fr. Vignola understood profoundly the world of his times. He grasped the fact that if there were those seeking to poison, that is, those who would teach without a sense of faith and delicacy, much harm would be done to so many young souls. Eventually, he felt this could ruin and destroy society itself.

Sad to say, in his times, there very well could have been inscribed over many schools: 'Butcher shop of conscience, slaughter house of souls!' A remedy was sorely needed for such frightful conditions. To save the youth, the great Pontiff, Leo XIII, had said that it would be necessary to walk along the edge of hell. To Fr. Vignola, whatever the cost would be, the school was to be re-opened.

[25] A learned Priest said about those times:

This is precisely what the new Superior said to me one day, using other words, concerning this project. I was congratulating him for having had the far-seeing courage to provide for a wholesome education of the youth, in preparing Christians for life in this world, as well as for the life of heaven.

From the opening day, the school flourished. It was frequented by other Religious Congregations in the city, especially by the new College of St. Aloysius, the Camillians, Fr. Provolo's students as well as those of Monsignor Comboni. Illustrious families sent their sons there, as did those of the nobility and aristocracy. They all stated that they were happy to send their sons to school at the Stimate. The results were most heart-warming, because when the boys graduated, and then went on to the Seminary, or to the state Universities, the mere fact that in their applications, they stated that they had attended the Stimate, was of itself a sufficient recommendation. Fr. Vignola himself took over the directorship of the school.

However, **the End of the Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Stigmata is not only the instruction and education of youth, but it is also Preaching, especially Missions, the Spiritual Exercises, and the explanation of Christian Doctrine.** During the Administration of Fr. Vignola, this phase of the 'End' was fulfilled in a manner never before equaled. A great many Missions and courses of the Spiritual Exercises were preached, and so many

parishes benefited by the schools of Christian Doctrine, called the Fourth Class³.

There was no danger during his years as Superior that any of his sons would be left inactive. The **Parish Missions** followed one right after another. The schedule was such that as one of the Missionaries closed one Mission, his companions would set out for another parish to open the next one. Those assigned to teaching, in the times they had free from school, were occupied in preaching. On all the holy days,

³ Translators' Note: Fr. P. Vignola reflects well the early ideal taught by Fr. Lenotti a Novice trained by the Founder himself:

It is most helpful also to reflect from one of these very special sons of the saintly Founder the genuine portrait of the **Apostolic Missionary**, according to St. Gaspar's heart, in the new Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Stigmata of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us consider Fr. John B. Lenotti: he came to the Founder still as a Seminarian [a *timid rabbit!*], and received his First Formation from St. Gaspar; he was a man by nature and by grace who would have been the very least capable of altering the ideal handed on by the Founder. He was the first Master of Novices in the Congregation, [as the Founder himself had been his!], and then later the Superior General. He tried to put together a **Directory for Novices**³ a work that remained incomplete at his death³. He also wrote a most wonderful *Proemium* to this work – while it may not stand out for its elegant Latin, the ideal presented is familiar to generations of Stigmatines:

...The End of the Sodality is this: to be Apostolic Missionaries, for the service, or help, of Bishops. Therefore, its members ought to be always ready and prepared, both day and night, at any hint on the part of their own Superior, even in an instant, to go anywhere, whether near, or far, whether within the city, or outside, to undertake any office or ministry conferred upon them: to giving instructions, sermons, the Spiritual Exercises, to any group of men whatever: to hearing confessions of those held in prisons, and to be with those who may be condemned to death; to supplying for this or that Chair of Philosophy or Theology, as well as filling in at a Parish for a time which may be unexpectedly deprived of its Pastor; and whenever a given work has been completed, and even when not yet perfectly accomplished, they should be ready to give up the place to someone else, and be ready to take on some other more grave [graviora] and difficult [ardua et difficilis] assignment. And they should do all this, and all the more so when this should come about: with a joyful spirit, a happy face, without offering excuses of their own ineptitude, or that they have had too little study, without seeking the reasons for all this, and without receiving or demanding any compensation [gratis]. They are to be prepared for all [parati ad omnia] to which the Superior might send them. The Superior should try to meet the needs of the Bishop, and deny nothing to him, in so far as this would be possible and the Community has confreres who are suited for a given task. And the Superior will deny nothing, and indeed will even try to meet the requests of pastors, wherever they may have a need, in so far as this will prove possible, and to provide the means...

almost every one of the Priests would go to some Church or other, to teach the **Fourth Class**. Fr. Vignola himself took part in preaching, both the Parish Missions, as well as the **Spiritual Exercises** to religious Communities. He, too, often taught **Christian Doctrine** every holy day.

In addition to being the Superior of the Congregation, he was [26] assigned by the Chancery Office as the Director of a number of Institutes, of all the Sister Penitents of St. Sylvester, and of the Sisters of the Holy family. He was named examiner of Vocations of the Seminarians, as well as Pro-Synodal Examiner.

To this should be added the great number of persons from all walks of life, especially Priests, who flocked to his **Confessional**, or who sought him out for **counsel** in their difficulties. He was esteemed by all of them as a man of counsel. His advice would always be brief, frank and precise, and everyone left him contented. He would give this advice at the proper time, sometimes in the form of a story, or as a prayer, and would only give it after having reflected on the matter for some time.

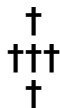
He could very well be compared to St. Francis de Sales. He possessed in an eminent degree, a talent that we might call **the art of administration**. To achieve success, he knew well how to wait. He was convinced, as we all should be, that virtue grows slowly, almost unnoticed. His norm was to go slowly in all things, and never to walk ahead of Grace. He believed that without grace, nothing would be gained.

From this, it should be clear that his gentleness was in some quarters, judged as weakness. Whoever would think this, must know that there is a weakness that is more venerable than power, as that of a baby, or a woman, and that it is sometimes causes greater awe than does that of a king. As Superior, Fr. Vignola knew that there are some wounds that are cured by oil, and that there are others that can only be remedied by fire and iron. Whenever he employed this latter expedient, it was clear that it was most distasteful to him. Everyone knows that there is nothing more tender, and at the same time, more powerful than tears.

This was Fr. Vignola as Superior as he seemed to his penitents, to those in distress and also to those who were subjects under his administration⁴.

⁴ **Translator's Note: The Apostolic Missionary:** a beautiful description of the *Apostolic Missionary* in the mind of Fr. Bertoni – [comparable to this description of Fr. Peter Vignola by Fr. Gurisatti] - may be found in his letter 4 to Fr. Bragato, dated December 1, 1837, in which he tells us beloved confrere the work of his close collaborator, Fr. Marani. There is particular emphasis in Fr. Bertoni's description of Fr. Marani's *Apostolic Mission toward the Clergy, both seminarians and priests*:

... Fr. Marani spends his days in school at the Stimate; evenings and on days free from classes, he works at the House of the Dereletti. At the Stimate, he teaches his classes, and studies in the library for his Preaching. At the Dereletti on Saturday evenings and on Sundays, he hears confessions, and at great length, and



[27]

Chapter 10 His Last Years and His Death

During the last years of his administration, Fr. Vignola did not limit his zeal to the City of Verona. He extended it far beyond. He assigned his priests to **preach Parish Missions in other cities, as well as to teaching**, when there was an equal need for **Christian Education**. He tried to respond to this anxious cry, heard from one end of Italy to the other calling for **Religious Instruction**. To this cry, he added his efforts, to bring about what was wiser and more merciful, that of total instruction. The frightening number of the illiterate had made people forget that there were even millions more who were uneducated. This is the real and deep wound of our present society. It festers all the more as the number of those who are totally illiterate dwindles.

This man of God, from his first years as Superior, opened the House of Parma, for which his predecessor, Fr. Lenotti, had only begun the negotiations. In accord with the wishes of that Bishop of holy memory, Bishop Villa, the elementary school was opened at *Borgo Bertano*. This was the most miserable and abandoned section of the city. Then an Oratory and a recreation center was opened for the youth.

Bishop Riboldi, who was later a Cardinal, wanted the Congregation to come to Pavia. An Oratory, a recreation Center and a Night School were opened, and Missions were preached in a great number of the villages of the Diocese. Through

with much fruit for the entire neighborhood. The other evenings he gives a Conference in Moral Theology with about ten, or twelve Priests, like in the old days which was our custom at St. Firmus'. After his methodological exposition which he conducts along the style of Fr. Guerrerri: he offers his opinion and resolves, as the situation might demand, and this is every day, the most intricate cases, and the Lord has bestowed on him light, prudence and more than ordinary great charity. On Thursdays, as is the practice, he takes part in the Scrutinies of the Seminarians, and after this, he receives penitents of every manner, and at every hour, even interrupting his lunch, his supper, and putting off his own rest. Likewise on Feast Days he hears Confessions in the Choir area at St. Stephen's up until the time it is time for him to give his Instructions at St. Sebastians, which goes until to the time which the Lord Himself determines. The People listen to him very willingly, and it seems that the Word of God is not just cast on the ground, but it is received on good ground [cf. Mt 13:8, 23]. Before taking up again the course of his instructions, I sent him to St. Zeno's to preach the Octave for the deceased....⁴

the influence of Bishop Villa, who was from Bassano, the Congregation also established a High School, an Oratory and a Recreation Center there. Finally, in the last year of his life, Fr. Vignola sent his sons to Rome.

All of these holy endeavors were truly the incarnation of his spirit. They were the master-stroke, for which he lives and will live, blessed by his just reward. These blessings of his, come not only to his sons, and to the Veronese, but also in those cities where the Stigmatines visited.

[28] The consoling effects of all his work were evident during the year of his Jubilee. On that day, all of his sons were gathered around their beloved Father. He was moved by it all, to the point of tears, and he received a glimpse of the glory of eternity that awaited him. The talents and hearts of his sons united in their tribute to him. From the holy city, the hand of the Supreme Pontiff blessed him and his family. Moved by it all, he seemed to explain: ***Now, O Lord, dismiss Your servant in peace!*** His last wish had been fulfilled, and he was ready to die. However, his rugged constitution was to keep him in good health for four more years, working as he had done from the time he had been a young man.

He was in his 80th year, on Sunday, August 23, 1891. That morning, as was his custom, he had heard the Confessions of his penitents, and said a late Mass for the convenience of the people. After dinner, he went to the Sisters at St. Sylvester's. With that great heart of his, that paid no heed to the weight of his heavy schedule, nor his many years, for one hour he instructed those Daughters of misfortune and tears.

When he came down from the pulpit, he gave Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament. He then stopped to talk for a few moments with the Mother Superior concerning some matters of the Institute. He took his cape and hat, and started out the door. He suddenly felt ill, and complained of a severe headache. He was ushered into the Chapter Room, where he sat down. Shortly afterwards, he slumped backward, unconscious. A priest and the doctor were summoned. Immediately the Last Sacraments were administered to him. After three hours of agony, he was dead. The call to eternity came to him in the field of his labors, and he answered the summons to appear before God.

The beloved Father was laid out on a miserable cot. To those who came to pay their last respects and to pray for his eternal repose, he seemed composed in the solemn sadness of death, and in the cold ecstasy **[29]** of silence and peace. His eyes seemed as though they were closed in sleep, and there was a slight smile on his face. He seemed to be absorbed in happy thoughts with the Angels.

We will never forget the beloved image of Fr. Peter. With his head bent slightly forward, and his hair whitened by long years of meditation on the things of God, he was an impressive sight. His eyes seemed recollected in sentiments of humility and serene in the joys of love. His lips were long employed in imparting counsel and hope, as well as Prayer. His whole face seemed to bespeak a peaceful and dignified

benevolence. He had such a look of meekness about him, that this image remains engraved on our minds and hearts. Our beloved and good Father - bless, and bless always, your beloved Congregation, and all those who remember the example of your virtues and who honor your memory.

On that great day, will his vesture appear more resplendent!



Chapter 11 His Funeral

By special permission of the city officials, the day after his death his body was brought back from St. Sebastian's to the Stimate. His funeral was set for the next day.

It was the summer season, and many families and Religious Institutes were out of the city. Nevertheless, a very large number of people from every walk of life, especially Priests, who were the most attached to him, attended his funeral and took part in the procession to the cemetery. This was a genuine tribute of the sincere and profound esteem in which Fr. Peter was held throughout the city.

His sons, however, were not content with just this service. They wanted to honor him with a solemn ceremony, and it was decided to delay until a better time, when more families and religious Institutes would be back in the city. The 18th of November was chosen as the date.

St.. Teresa's Church seemed more suitable and spacious than the Church of the Stimate. It was gorgeously set out in mourning. In the center, a majestic catafalque was erected with appropriate inscriptions.

The service began, as is customary, with the singing of the Nocturn, which was followed by the Mass, celebrated by the Vicar General, Monsignor John Baptist Peloso. All the parts of the Mass – the Introit, the *Dies Irae* and the Offertory - were sung quite well in Gregorian Chant. For the *Libera nos Domine*, the children sang alto, and others attending sang the bass.

The eulogy was delivered by the Very Reverend Arch-Priest of the Holy Apostles Church, Fr. Louis Giacomelli. It was full of his most delicate and successful style, that he so well brings out in his writings. He expressed some very moving sentiments.

There was a large number of laity in attendance, as well as representatives of Religious Institutes, many Priests and noble families. They all flocked to the Church that Morning, both for the many low Masses that were celebrated as well as for the Solemn Mass.

I will try to bring this *Compendium* to a close, citing the inscriptions that were composed for the occasion:

†

Over the Main Door

To the Beloved and Blessed Soul – Of Fr. Peter Vignola, Superior of the Priests Of the Sacred Stigmata – The Sons of his Heart – In Solemn Tribute of Prayer and Mourning.

†

Around the Catafalque

For God and For Souls – From Your Earliest Years, Your only Loves - You have trod All the Laborious Paths – of the Apostolic Ministry.

Upright in Character with Affectionate Smile – An Illumined and Operative Charity – Undaunted Patience – attracted Hearts to You – and You brought them to God.

A Paradise of Benign Wisdom – was Your Mind – A Treasure of Holy Affections – was Your Heart – Ah! In a Flash – so Beautiful a Mind, so Beautiful a Heart, had gone!

[31] Right up until the Last Hour – of Your Advanced Old Age – You burned with zeal – For the Salvation of Others – You fell on the Way – As a True Soldier.

†

Under His Portrait

The Image of the Father – That Death destroyed - But He Lives eternal in the Grateful Hearts – of the Many who Loved Him.

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A
Compendium
of the Life
of
Fr. Vincent Vignola

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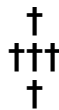
Chapter 1 Who was Fr. Vincent?

To write the Life of Fr. Vincent Vignola is an undertaking that should intimidate anyone who does not have a mind and a virtue that is far superior to the ordinary. Fr. Vincent was a most endearing man, endowed with a most candid nature. He had a keen intellect, a most sure judgment and a most meek heart. His was a most solid virtue, and a most unusual holiness. He would have us think of what St. Thomas said one day concerning St. Bonaventure who was writing the life of the Holy Patriarch, St. Francis of Assisi: *Only a Saint can write the life of another saint!*

In our present case, it ought to be said: 'You would have to find a learned man who is also holy to write about Fr. Vincent – it should not be attempted by anyone who lacks either of these qualities.'

However, the writer of these lines has been urged by those who are bound by a similar affection for their beloved Father and old Master of Novices. Therefore, the author of this present Biography bids the pious reader to attribute to him that love that blinds and deceives, not allowing us to know ourselves and our own insufficiency.

This having been said, we will not set out on our endeavor. we will make every effort to be brief, because our subject, in truth, could not be dealt with adequately.

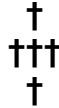


Chapter 2 Vincent as a Boy

Vincent Vignola was born in Verona on October 25, 1821, in the Cathedral Parish. His excellent parents were outstanding Christian [34] citizens. They were John Baptist Vignola and Lucia Fiorani. Vincent was baptized the day following his birth.

To sum up in a few words all that is known of Vincent as a child we can use as our principle that from the morning, one can judge what kind of day it will be. The fortunate parents and family of this beloved child were able to see the holy life that he would lead, by noting in him early a candid, joyful and peaceful temperament. He seemed to be permeated with goodness and he was the joy of his family. Years later, as a grown man, he gave of most edifying example of his imperturbable tranquility and heroic patience. On the first anniversary of his beloved Mother's death, young Vincent was walking through the garden of his family home, absorbed in sad thoughts. He did not notice a ditch in his path, and he fell into it, and badly bruised and cut himself about his head. A doctor was summoned immediately, and

he applied a most painful remedy. However, this was inexpertly done, and the poor boy still had much to endure, submitting to a frequent cauterizing that was both painful and dangerous. Through it all, he never gave the least sign of impatience, nor complaint. The doctor stated that he had never seen anyone, even in adult age, who had such heroism and heroic patience, as he came to admire in that lovable, little boy.



Chapter 3 School Years

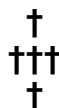
In 1827, when Vincent was almost 6 years of age, he began attending elementary school. He completed four grades as was the system at the time. He stood out because of his special diligence, his extraordinary memory and his quick mind. He likewise distinguished himself because of his modest and affability with his companions. He won their hearts and those of everyone with whom he came in contact. Because of his great submission toward his teachers, he was proposed as a model to his fellow students.

About this time [35], he received his First Communion, and began to receive It frequently. And with edifying devotion. What can be said of his spirit of piety which, in the schools of that period, was not much esteemed. He was most devoted to the Most Holy Mother of God, As he had lost his own Mother as a young child, he chose Maary as his Heavenly Mother, and remained devoted to her throughout his life.

When he had completed elementary school, he was enrolled in the regional lyceum. In those years, his mind and ability came to be known even more. His talents opened up, and he surpassed his fellow students, especially in the sciences, physics and mathematics.

In addition to the positive sciences, for which he manifested a fertile and versatile mind, it was evident that he had a great ability in poetry. In his early years at the lyceum, he was under the tutelage of the Professor of Italian Literature, Professor Capparozzo. It was noted that the boy had a facile, poetical style that was evident in all his verses. He gathered poetry and wrote his own in two very beautiful volumes.

To sum up in a few words all that has a bearing on the studies and talent of young Vincent, it would suffice to say that all of his fellow students, as well as his teachers, had for him a sincere esteem, a most tender love and a holy envy. The few testimonies that have come down to us, are most laudatory, and give abundant proof of this.



Chapter 4 As a Seminarian

Audisius, in treating of the signs of a vocation to the Priesthood states that these are not just a few, or different acts, as those could be the result of art of hypocrisy. What is needed is the evidence of natural, good habits. These indicate the inclinations, the temperament and the soul of a [36] Youngman.

We read in the Book of Wisdom: ***And I was a witty child, and had received a good soul!*** [Ws 8:19]. 'I was a witty child' – i.e., exceptionally formed and disposed by nature to acquire wisdom. 'I received a good soul' – not by my own merit but because of a gift of God, I received a good soul. That means a good nature corresponding to a natural temperament. This natural inclination for good, I received through the gratuitous beneficence of God.

Under this aspect, Audisius reasons;

I would be content with a greater or lesser intellectual ability, but I would never cease demanding from aspirants to a way of life that demands such humility, abnegation and charity, as does the Priesthood. This is the 'good soul' intended by the Holy Spirit, because grace ordinarily makes use of nature, and perfects it.

As another great Servant of God has said: 'Temperament and nature are the foundation on which the Grace of God works.' Now, I say that this fundamental sign of a vocation, more than any other, was found in an eminent degree in young Vincent Vignola. When he finished the course at the lyceum, he answered the call which he had heard echoing in his heart for some time. In 1840, he sent in an application to the Diocesan Seminary, and was accepted into the Theological Course. For a long time, previously, his innate goodness, his angelic modesty and his spirit of prayer had given those of his family and all those who knew him every indication that one day he would be a Priest.

He studied at the Seminary for four years. From his very first day there, he won the hearts of his fellow seminarians, as well as of his teachers. This was due to his edifying conduct, his jovial temperament, his diligence in study, his exact observance of the seminary rules, his obedience and his piety. During the early months as a Seminarian, he was vested and received the Minor Orders.

Both he and his family were most happy. He was happy because he had achieved his great hope of being vested as a soldier [37] of Jesus Christ. His family was delighted, in that it considered itself blessed to have consecrated to God, and enrolled in the army of the Church, the fifth of its sons.

With his Vestition, Vincent dedicated himself with greater ardor of spirit to a way of life in which all who saw him could truly compare themselves to him. The hours of the day were well divided between prayer and the fulfillment of his duties in

the Church and study. On holy days, he spent all his time in the service of his Parish, in instructing the youth in the Oratory and in Christian Doctrine. He would also supervise them and direct them in their recreations.

In truth, therefore, it can be said that as a Seminarian, he began that life of sacrifice that was to last all his days. He gave up his sleep, his own comforts and dedicated his very being for the good of others. There is no wonder, then, that he easily obtained a dispensation, because he lacked the Canonical Age, and was promoted to the Major Orders, including the Priesthood.



Chapter 5 As a Priest

In St. Stephen's parish, it was long the custom to celebrate with due solemnity, the feast of the exaltation of the Holy Cross in the month of September, by means of a Triduum.

The Vignola family, had somewhat previously moved from the Cathedral Parish to old St. Stephen's Parish. Then, on the 3rd Sunday of September, in 1844, the Feast of the Holy Cross was being observed. The newly ordained, Fr. Vincent Vignola celebrated his First Mass, assisted on the altar by his four priests brothers, who had already been ordained. We cannot describe the beauty of that moving day.

Shortly after his ordination, he was assigned to this Church. He immersed himself immediately in the works of charity, and zeal for the salvation of souls. He was totally dedicated to the priestly ministry, and his most benign and kind manner, was inspired all the more to conquer hearts for God.

[38] His most loving and intelligent efforts were spent for the good of souls. The beautiful and beloved image of St. Philip Neri seems to have come alive in him. The little urchins of St Stephen's would chase after him, as did the children of Palestine of long ago, follow after the Divine Redeemer. He delighted in speaking to them of God, of the Blessed Mother and of the Saints – he had a special knack in bringing about such conversations.

One day he was walking with the boys past the Jesuit Novitiate Chapel on the *Corso della Porta Nuova*. He asked the boys: 'Did you hear that bell? It is announcing the services for the Triduum in honor of St Stanislaus Kotska. He was once a young lad, as you are now ...' For the rest of their walk, Fr. Vincent told them the life story of the young Saint which they enjoyed very much.

From 1850 – 1857, he was assigned to give the weekly lesson of Religious Instruction to the students of the public school, of St. Stephen's Parish. He fulfilled

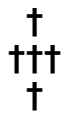
this task with such success, that he merited the most ample praise from his Superiors, especially the Bishop. A Citation of the Imperial Royal Inspector of the district, dated October 3, 1853, greatly praised his zeal, charity and diligence. The citation also expressed the desire that every such school might have a Catechist, such as Fr. Vincent.

However, Fr. Vincent's activity was not limited to the Priestly Ministry. As he was endowed with a quick and versatile mind, he never gave up his beloved studies of Italian literature, both prose and poetry. As we shall see, he was also most dedicated to the physical sciences, and mathematics.

His ability in this last mentioned field was further attested to by the fact that in 1854, he was named a 'Corresponding Associate of the Academy of Agriculture, Arts and Commerce.' In thus being enrolled, he received a diploma and its statutes, and the Academy made it known that it gloried in having so capable a number in its ranks. This was not a mere formal compliment, as three years earlier, in the meeting of the Academy, dated May 22, 1851, it recorded that it has conferred [39] its gold medal on the 'Abbot', Fr. Vincent Vignola, for his important and useful modifications on the electric motor.

Then, in the year 1855, when Bishop Riccabona was ruling the Diocese, he named Fr. Peter Vignola as Pastor of St. Firmus Major. Fr. Vincent requested and received permission to go there as his Curate. In this Parish, at his brother's side, he dedicated himself, heart and soul, to assist him in his pastoral ministry.

Fr. Vincent had always lived in perfect peace and harmony with all of his beloved brothers. It truly seemed as though one could not live apart from the others. There was such love among them, that it seemed that they had all the same heart and soul. Nonetheless, it had been decreed by God that their paths would separate, as will be seen in the next Chapter.



Chapter 6 As a Stigmatine

From the last words of the preceding chapter, the pious reader could readily deduce that God was calling Fr. Vincent to a more perfect life. As had his brother, Fr. Peter, he, too, had come to have a very high regard for our first confreres. The Venerable Founder, from the year 1846, had sent them to assist with the Youth Program and the Parish endeavors in St. Stephen's Parish. The Vignola home was just a few steps away from the House of *Santa Maria del Giglio*. For some time, then, the Stigmatine had been his ideal, and his continual ardent desire.

Although he was so close to his brothers and had never kept anything from them, he never once mentioned this to them. His reason was that because of their closeness to one another, he kept his greatest secret to himself for fear of saddening them.

He did, however, expose his desire to Fr. Marani, and reached an understanding with him. Fr. Marani was then the Superior of the Stigmatines, having recently succeeded the Venerable Founder.

The day set for his entrance finally arrived, and Fr. Vincent [40] then told his brothers, and his only sister, Teresa, all about his plan. This one sister, being the oldest of the children, they all had loved as a Mother.

We can only imagine how this announcement took them by complete surprise. We can also say that they were disappointed, and all opposed his decision most resolutely. The one most vehement in his objections was Fr. Peter, who had come to rely heavily on him in his Parish, in addition to loving him as a brother. Fr. Peter had but shortly before taken over his Parish, and little did he know then that God had also chosen him to enter this Congregation, and that one day he would be its Superior General.

However, Fr. Vincent was set on serving God with the total abnegation of his own will, and was convinced that this was the Will of God. He remained firm, gave up all that he owned and left that very evening, November 28, 1856, to enter the Stimmate.

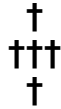
On the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8th of that same year, he began his Novitiate, with another Stigmatine Aspirant, Joseph Marchesini⁵. His piety, affability, gentleness and meekness were most apparent. He gave immediate evidence of his spirit of sacrifice, that is, his spirit of obedience, poverty, mortification, patience and charity. In all these traits, he soon gave a most brilliant example.

During his first year of Novitiate, that is, on February 28, 1857, it was transferred from the Stimamte to the House of the *Santissima Trinita'*. Fr. Vincent was involved in this transfer with the other Novices, among whom, there were three Priests, with their Master, Fr. John Baptist Lenotti.

In those times, the ancient Convent of the *Trinita'* was badly in need of renovation. The Cloister was actually falling down, the walls were crumbling and the rooms were dark and in poor repair. As a result, this fervent Novice from his first day there, was supplied with the means of practicing holy Poverty. After a sufficient proof of this virtue, as well as the other religious virtues of Obedience and Chastity, the two years of Novitiate, which were then customary, passed, and Fr. Vincent made his Perpetual Profession. In 1859, he and all the others of the House, returned to the

⁵ His life story will be found in Volume 3 of this series by Fr. Pio Gurisatti.

Stimate, because of the renovations at the *Trinita*, which by now were judged absolutely necessary. Work was begun on the old Convent right way.



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Chapter 7 Fr. Vincent, Missionary

With good reason, I felt that this present Chapter could be entitled 'Fr. Vincent, Missionary.' Among the few priests who at the Stimate in those times, called themselves ***Apostolic Missionaries***, there were some who preached as many Parish Missions, Spiritual Exercises to Colleges of both men and women, Religious Communities, Seminarians and Priests, as did Fr. Vincent. He began in his very first year, even from his first months as a Novice, to preach important Mission that were crowned with excellent results. To mention only his more important assignments: on December 19, 1854, he began one at St. Peter's in Morubio; in January of 1857, at San Massimo's in Stelle of Valpantena. Immediately after that, he went to the Conossian Teaching Sisters of Cremona, then to the Clarissan Sisters of Verona. In 1858, he went to Vicenza, then to St. Anthony's Basilica in Padua, and to Noventa di Piave, where he heard Confessions 12 hours a day.

A characteristic of the Missionary journeys undertaken in those times by our first Confreres, such as Fr. Vincent beginning in 12858, was that one Parish Missin followed right after the other. They left, for example, on June 14th for Montorio, then moved on to Pigozzo, Trezzolano, Velo, Tregnago, Bolea, Vestaina and always just prior to the Bishop's Visitation of these places. The Fathers did not return to Verona until the 22nd of July. This list only includes the Mission and retreats that he preached. Not only during his early years in Religion was this his assignment, but with the passing of time, he went to Mondovi, the Cathedral of Treviso, to San Zeno in Val di Non, to Borgo, Vallarsa, Roncegno, Villiazzano, Povo, Trent and many other places.

When he would return from these Missions, he busied himself in the City with his ardent zeal for the good of different religious groups, through his preaching and hearing Confessions. His facile delivery and learned sermons that he gave in explaining the Gospel, as well as in his Catechetical Instructions, monthly days of recollection, not to mention his instructions, conferences, meditations, along with his academic discourses and panegyrics, made him a welcome [42] speaker who brought consoling results. This list does not even include the courses of Spiritual Exercises that he gave many times down over the years to our own Community.

He made use of the same principles and truths, that according to the method of St. Ignatius were established for the Spiritual Exercises. He would nevertheless present these same maxims, always under a different aspect. He not only was not boring, but he often was even entertaining!

Among his most celebrated accomplishments was a Retreat he gave one year on 'The Workings of a Clock'! This retreat was so named because of the introduction, the meditations and closing were all based on the various parts that make up a clock. He used as his examples the casing, the wheels and their purpose, the mechanism, the glass, the springs, the hands, levers, gears, movements, coils, screws, cylinders, rings, weights, chains, metals, gold, silver and steel. It was a delight to hear him!

It was also a marvel to see him always ready and prepared for any type of preaching. Often he would substitute for anyone who had been assigned to a specific task who was unable to meet his commitment, due to illness or any other reason. The Superiors would turn instinctively to Fr. Vincent, who was always ready and even happy to accept.

Fr. Marani used to say: ***Be ready for all things [Parati ad omnia!]*** – and for him, this was not merely a slogan. He often asked for its fulfillment, even from the young students, There is recorded one example of this – on Saturday in 1868, Fr. Marani had commented on his oft-repeated challenge: ***Be ready for all things!*** He then added to one of the students who was standing near him: 'Tomorrow morning, you will explain to the Oratory the meaning of: 'Be prepared for all things!' The student accepted the order, kissed Fr. Marani's hand, and went off to prepare himself. Fr. Vincent often received a similar assignments during his life. He was in truth the genuine Missionary in motion, always prepared for all things.

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Chapter 8 Fr. Vincent as a Teacher

The life of a Missionary is a life of continual privations, indescribable fatigue and true sacrifice. In addition to delivering the assigned sermons, he often would have to remain in the Confessional for as much as 15 hours a day. I will not mention here the other privations which he must expect, more or less according to the places, the individuals, the rectories and the seasons. Because of this, the Venerable Fr. Segneri has well written: 'Whoever is not disposed to suffer cold, hunger and this, should not be a missionary.'

With this in mind, there should be no wonder, then, that as Fr. Vincent lived the life of a true Missionary for many years without respite, without ever seeming tired, but even, according to his nature, he was indifferent, happy and even content - his health was to suffer as a result. He paid little heed to it, and the superiors due to the indifference he manifested during it, also did not notice it. However, his disposition gradually worsened, and in 1862, he became seriously ill. He began to

spit blood and it was clear that his life was in danger. Thanks to God, he did recover somewhat, but the doctors forbade him to preach any more.

In that same year, the renovations were just about completed at the *Santissima Trinita*'. On The Feast of St. Charles, November 4, 1862, the Novitiate and the Student House were moved back from the Stimmate to the *Trinita*'. The following was the list of its personnel: Fr. Lenotti was Superior and Master of Novices; Fr. Marchesini, Prefect; and Fr. Vincent Vignola, Teacher.

The many and rare talents that Fr. Vincent possessed, were well known to the Superiors. He was especially capable in Italian Literature, physics and mathematics. Hence, the judgment was made that he could still be useful even in his somewhat [44] weakened health. He was assigned as teacher of these subjects, and this new appointment was a delight to him.

Fr. Vincent began his teaching career in the private High School and Lyceum of Verona, during that November of 1862. He continued in this role until the 18th of August 1866. On that day, because of the political upheaval, he went to the Province of Trent with the Students, who were transferred there. Fr. Vincent continued teaching until 1874.

His classes in Italian, as well as those in physics and mathematics, were comparable to those of an experienced Professor. His explanations were most learned, clear and evident; they were accompanied by his goodness, kindness and charity. The students looked upon his classes as a sort of pass-time. He was a capable man, but never gave any indication of pretension. He used to be genuinely embarrassed in front of his students when they showed their esteem for him. He used to say that his only qualifications for teaching was his '**Degree of Ignorance!**' He was a humble man, meek and patient. When the occasion arose, and he had to correct his students, he would also direct their attention to his own faults.

He was so clear in his explanations that even the mediocre students were able to grasp them. He used to make use of the most common and understandable similitudes and comparisons. In the presence of his Superiors, he would often come to the defense of his Students. One day, in 1867, he wrote to the Superior General from Villazzano. In his letter he described the students as a promising group of mathematicians, who were a joy to him, and who so readily understood the matter he presented. He expressed his thanks to God for them.

Fr. Vincent, however, did not limit his activities to teaching, but he also attended to his own learning. The old *Academias*, that were common in that time, were put on almost without number, and were under his direction and assistance. We will indicate here only a few of the principal ones: the memorable and most successful *Accademia* presented for the Golden Jubilee of Fr. Marani in 1864. He wrote a poem for that occasion that Professor Gagliardi put to music:

Onward, my brothers, ever up and free

**In Mirth and rejoicing toward our goal .
Let us show in our faces for all to see
This happiness profound, that is in our soul !**

He also wrote a few verses of dedication for the oil portrait of the Superior, painted by the artist Recchia, and donated for the occasion by the Vezzari family:

**How beautiful indeed is this portrait!
How well it captures his usual state.
His expression grave, but al so serene
His manifest kindness is herein seen
In his clear eyes there is detected
The depth of his soul , therein reflected.
How beautiful indeed is this portrait!**

Shortly after their transfer to Trent, another *Academia* was held for the 50th anniversary of the Congregation, 1816-1866. There were also others, as the 25th anniversary of the Pontificate of Pope Pius IX, the centenary [1874] of St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Bonaventure, for various Fests of St. Joseph and those held on the Espousals almost every year. Professor Gagliardi also put to music the beautiful Hymn to the Espousals, that begins:

**So worthy of praise is Mary's Name
Throughout heaven and earth is its renown,
But al so does his have an equal cl aim,
As God espoused Joseph, his too doth resound.
Pure lilies of untarnished splendor
Each breathing forth a heavenly odor
Among You, grow these two plants.**

He took every occasion to offer a sample of his verses. One of these described in an imaginary manner, a trip he made to preach a Mission in San Zeno, in Val di Non. It also describes a trip he made to the Sanctuary of San Remedio. It ended with a poem on the '*Bread of the Nonnes*', a sort of simple and flowing poem of 250 verses of 5 syllables each.

On the occasion of the First Mass of Fr. Charles Zara, as Fr. Vincent had been explaining Euclid in class, he took the time to compose a most affectionate letter. In it, he asked pardon for not having written a worthy poem. However, his letter was full of such expressions as: Conical sections ... hyperbole and parable ... elliptical curvatures ... parellelepypeda ... In addition to these expressions which he presented in rhyme, he had about 70 'septenary dactyls'.

We will not comment here on his many other poetical compositions, one more beautiful than the preceding. The night before he left for Trent, he was bothered by a mosquito, and as he could not sleep, he got up and described his experience in verse. It is really a delight to read. He wrote another ode to a 'Pumpkin'; another entitled: 'In His Easy Chair'; and still another entitled: 'Self-Love.' His work was much like that of a piano [46] tuner. Suffice it to say that the poems he wrote and collected amount to two volumes. Writing these verses was not his only hobby, but he took

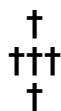
delight also in prose. He inserted in all his writings, even his humorous ones, a moral, aimed at the good of souls.

From the first year he was at Villazzano, and more precisely on December 16, 1866, on his own initiative, he devised an idea that would help keep strong the union and charity with the Confreres in Verona. He thought up the idea of issuing a Newsletter, that was to be sent out every 15 days. The first issue had as its title: **Messaggero Tirolese**.⁶ The first section was always a religious exhortation. Then, there would be a Chronicle of events of items of interest. Every issue that has come down to us was compiled and written under his direction. That same year, he wrote the *Biography of Anthony Caucigh*, proposing him as the model for the young Novices. He also compiled a booklet entitled: 'The Month of St. Joseph' – for the Novices and the students which he wrote and bound himself.

On November 4, 1866, a few months after he arrived in Trent, as he felt he had too little to do, he accepted a class of Christian Doctrine. For some time, this had been taught in the Seminary Chapel, and had always been poorly attended. With his clear, and understandable explanations, and his friendly manner, he gave this Course new life.

It is not known, nor can it ever be explained, how that holly man found time for everything. After he had been teaching, writing, preaching, or hearing Confessions, whatever free time he had left, he would put it to good use. With his clever mind, he would make little gadgets, pictures or engage in arts and crafts, to distribute his creations as gifts to the children. He made a Tabernacle for the Blessed Sacrament, and set candle-sticks around it, on a wooden base. It was covered with paper, giving it the appearance of marble, and then was encased in glass. It was then set off with gold stripes, and beautiful designs.

After his serious illness, Fr. Vincent spent his years from 1866 – 1874 in this way. In this latter year, he was named Director.



Chapter 9 Fr. Vincent as Director

In the golden book of the *Imitation of Christ*, it is written:

It is a great and beautiful thing to live under obedience, to live under a Superior and not to be master of oneself. It is much more secure to be in subjection rather than to be in charge. Anywhere you may go, you will not find peace, except in humble acceptance and dependence on a Superior [Book I., c. 9]

⁶ Translaator's Note: The forerunner of the Stigmatine *Bertoniano*???

The principle was very deeply ingrained in the mind and heart of Fr. Vincent. Even though he was eminently qualified in mind and spirit, learning and holiness, he was 54 years of age before he was entrusted with the duty of commanding.

It is a well known fact that from the time Bishop Riccabona left Verona for the See of Trent [1861], he did all in his power to have Fr. Marani send the Stigmatines to his new Diocese. For this end, many and long negotiations were undertaken, with little or no success. The main problem was a lack of personnel.

However, the political events of 1866 came to the aid of the Bishop. He did not content himself with inviting the Stigmatines to find refuge in Trent, but he offered them the temporary occupancy of his own Episcopal Summer Residence in Villazzano, just outside the city. Even before the change in the government, about the middle of August, and more precisely on the 17th, the exodus began. The first group of Students accompanied by one of the Priests, set out from Verona. The next day, the second group left with Fr. Vincent, and a few more on each of the following days.

In the time that was required to move furniture, beds, kitchen utensils, etc., from Verona to Villazzano, our Confreres were hospitably lodged in a college that had been offered to them by Fr. Bernard Fusari, an excellent Priest of that city. They stayed there until August 24th, as on that day, the wagon [48] arrived at Villazzano. It was so heavy, however, that there was fear that it could not cross the Bridge at Fersa, which had to be crossed in order to reach Villazzano.

Our Students were to remain in Villazzano for six years with Frs. Richard DaPrato, John Baptist Lenotti and Vincent Vignola. In June of 1872, Bishop Riccabona fell gravely ill, and his doctors advised him to go out into the country during the summer months. Therefore, the Students moved again, this time to Povo, into a house rented from the Ballarini family. They remained here until November 24, 1874.

In the meantime, Fr. Vincent had been named Director of the Student House. In that position, he began negotiations to purchase the House of San Bernardino in Trent. Papers were passed on August 27, 1872.

The House was really only a farmer's shack. Next to it, there was a very large field of most fertile soil that promised a good crop. It was irrigated by the nearby Persa River, that cuts through the property. However, the house was in such bad repair, that it was truly and rightly called a 'shack.' The Director's first job was to have it renovated. This proved to be a long task, and the community could not move in there before 1874. Then began the most regular and normal period of Fr. Vincent's active life.

During these years, Fr. Lenotti and Fr. Vincent made the long journey from Trent to Prague to visit our beloved Confrere, Monsignor Bragato. After the political

changes of 1866, he no longer came back to Italy. The Empress Marianna, wife of Ferdinand, had a stupendous royal summer residence in Galliera of Cittadella. As she was Italian by birth, she used to remain there for the greater part of every year from early spring, through the fall. The Priests attached to her Court, always accompanied her there, and among these, was her personal Confessor Fr. Louis Bragato.

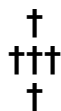
To this Priest, our Congregation is much indebted. It was he who maintained, and it might be even said, he is the one who [49] saved it during the years of its suppression. The real truth of the matter is that through his intercession, the most pious Empress sent sums of money to Trent. We ought to consider her as a true benefactress.

It was only proper that these two representatives of our Congregation should go there in person to express their gratitude to Fr. Bragato, and the august Empress. This visited resulted in benefiting substantially the recently opened House of Trent, and the young Students in lodged, who were in extreme need of being subsidized.

I cannot bring this Chapter to a close without at least mentioning briefly the great good accomplished by Fr. Vincent Vignola and his companions in the new House of San Bernardino. In addition to assisting the students in scholastic and spiritual matters, they gave Missions in many parts of the Diocese. Without respite, they reached to many Religious Institutes and frequently they were invited to the Seminary. The faculty there consisted of Monsignor Manin, Rector; Monsignor Zambelli, Spiritual Director – both of these were friends of Fr. Vincent; Monsignor Inherhoffer, Prefect; Monsignor Planer and Monsignor Molinari. Fr. Vincent came to be loved, esteemed and admired by all of these men, and scarcely a day would go by that he was not called upon by one or other of them.

An even greater accomplishment, though, was that Fr. Vincent began a most ambitious enterprise in the new House. He built a little Chapel on the ground floor, and opened it to the public. It was frequented not only by the People of Trent, but also by souls from the nearby villages of Povo and Villazzano. These people had a great love for our Fathers, and came to them in great numbers for Confession. Soon it became necessary to construct a door leading out into the street, and the little Church acquired the appearance of a sanctuary. Fr. Vincent was always available and took interest in all that went on.

He was entirely forgetful of himself,. And he manifested such a spirit of mortification, poverty and sacrifice that he was an edification for all. This, though, and even more will be seen better and more clearly in the following chapter.



[50]

Chapter 10 Fr. Vincent Director at Parma

On the 5th of September, 1875, the Superior General of holy memory, Fr. John Baptist Lenotti, passed away. Shortly thereafter, the Chapter met to choose his successor. By a marvelous disposition of God, Fr. Peter Vignola, Fr. Vincent's brother, was chosen. This was the same Fr. Peter who had done all in his power to dissuade his brother from entering, only to follow him a few years later. At this same Chapter, Fr. Vincent was named a General Councilor.

Bishop Villa, who had only recently taken over the See of Parma, had worked to have the Stigmatines in this city, and in his Diocese. He had already concluded the negotiations with Fr. Lenotti. It was also fairly well known that Fr. Lenotti was going to send Fr. Peter Vignola to Parma. As it turned out, Fr. Lenotti died, Fr. Peter succeeded him in the government of the Congregation and he sent his brother, Fr. Vincent to Parma. He set out on February 1, 1876, with Fr. Louis Morando and Bro. James Zadra. The previous evening, January 31st, there was held the moving service for those going on a journey that was concluded with the fraternal embrace.'

To secure this foundation, in addition to Bishop Villa, a pious layman, by the name of Camillus Cagliari had worked very hard. This fervent Catholic layman went himself there on that February 1st, to meet our Confreres at the station. In those extremely difficult days at Parma that resulted from the lack of finances and other matters that had to be ironed out, this generous man was a pillar of strength. He also enlisted the aid of other good persons worthy of mention, as the Countess Benassi, and others.

Fr. Vincent graphically described these anxious days in his Chronicle for the House of Parma. He wrote:

Our arrival seems to have moved both the good and the bad. The newspaper, *Il Presente*, on the day before we got there, had an article to the effect that the Priests of the Stimmate were coming to the city. The tone of the article was certainly not one of congratulations.

The campaign of presenting an appeal to the Mayor had not succeeded.

On March 7th, another unfavorable article appeared: 'The Brethren, or Priests of the Stimmate, impart to the people of that sector, the Sunday instructions.' Then it added the pointed comment: 'What does the Deputy, the Marchese, Mayor della Rosa, say of this?'

The Fathers began their work from scratch. St. Ignatius had said that Poverty is the foundation stone of religious houses. The community there lacked even the essentials. On March 18th, a coffee set arrived, consisting of four cups that were sent by the Countess Benassi. They did not even have the means there of making a fir. Bro Zadra one day told Fr. Vincent there were not even any wooden matches. He was told to say one *Hail Mary*, and shortly afterwards a wagon load of wood piled up

at the door. The Brother who had not ordered it, was about to send it back. He asked Fr. Vincent about it, and found that neither did he have any knowledge concerning it.

They were most concerned as to how they were going to pay for it. The wagon driver just said that he was told to deliver it, and wanted to know where he should unload it. Due to his insistence, they agreed to take it for the time being. Later, they discovered that it was the gift of a noble woman, their benefactress.

The Countess Saragna had heard that there were not enough beds in the house, so she went one day with a supply of blankets. On the day of their arrival in Parma, Bishop Villa gave them a ham for their dinner. However the Community never asked for a thing. As it was still the custom, then, to render their services gratuitously, Fr. Vincent once refused 30 Lira that was given to him for a sermon he preached on the Feast of the Finding of the Holy Cross. The vestry man prevailed upon him to take it. He would not, however, until he had written to his brother, Fr. Peter about the matter.

In this way, Fr. Vincent's reputation gradually increased. Bishop Villa, a zealous Apostle, hardly ever let a day go by without calling for him. The youth of the area were very soon attracted by [52] Fr. Vincent's fine manner and his gentle way. That sector that housed the dregs of society, earlier had to be policed, but in a short time its aspect changed.

On February 16th, just one day and two weeks after their arrival, Fr. Vincent was seen surrounded by 50 boys. 'They are too many to feed so soon,' he wrote jokingly. He sacrificed himself for them in school, in the Oratory, in the Recreation Center and in Church. They came to his Confessional and he sought them out in their houses and even along the streets.

One night, he was returning from a preaching assignment, and ran into a crowd of mischief-makers. They began to make fun of him. All of a sudden, a shout was heard from among the rabble: 'Don't say anything to that Priest – he is the best there is. We know him – he is Fr. Vincent of the *Quartiere!*'

Another day, he came across two boys who were arguing violently. Their words then became blows, and they shouted terrible curses at one another. The good Father just watched them. One of them said to him: 'Just mind your own business!' Fr. Vincent answered kindly: 'But, this is my business.' He then spoke to them in such a gentle way that soon they were asking his pardon. They then asked him if they could come into Church, and if he would hear their Confessions. He most happily heard their Confessions.

How he loved children! He would spend hours at a time making trinkets to give to them. He came to know of a poor boy and took an interest in him, because of his goodness. He sought to provide for him the necessities of life, and asked alms for him. He even deprived himself, even though his own life lacked these same necessities. He taught and instructed the boy privately. Such cases were multiplied

many times and without this charitable Priest, no one knows what would have become of them. With his help, a good number of them were able to find their places in life, and some of them even became Priests. I myself have come across some of those who gratefully attributed their successful careers to the charity of Fr. Vincent.

[53] It was not only the youth who benefited from the solicitous and loving care of this charitable Priest. He extended his zeal to every social level. All the sections and Church of the city, and especially those of the *Quartiere*, can attest to this – especially St. Charles, St. Cecilia, the *Chieppine* Sisters and the Guasti's. He frequently helped at the Diocesan Seminary, where all the Professors and most particularly, the future Cardinal Ferrari – who would become the Rector of the Seminary, came to love him. In years later, this Cardinal Archbishop of Milan often mentioned him.

Evenings, the Priests would gather at our House – among them would often be the future Cardinal], to discuss and to solve together the moral cases. In those sessions, they all came to know and admire in Fr. Vincent more than his angelic life. They came to see that he was a man of not just ordinary knowledge, and that he had a sound and practical judgment, that was remarkable.

It would suffice to know that after only four years in Parma, he was elected an Active Associate of the Academy of St. Thomas. On March 4, 1880 he received his membership scroll.

It would be too lengthy to give even a compendium of all the activities of Fr. Vincent as Director at Parma. To sum them all up, he was described as an angel of goodness, kindness, meekness and amiability. Very well could there be applied to him what he wrote of his brother, Fr. Ignatius Vignola, who died in 1876. Fr. Vincent wrote: 'Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the sons of God.' To those outside the House, Fr. Vincent was known as 'the Apostle of Parma.'⁷

⁷ **Translator's Note:** There is an interesting episode regarding Fr. Vincent from his 'Parma Years'. His name does not appear among the Capitulars present when the 10th General Chapter opened, Feb. 18-28-1881 – the re-election of his brother, Fr. Peter, was dead-locked. Here the Chapter Minutes speak:

IInd Session

the 20th day of February 1881, Sunday ⁷

On this day, at 3:00 p.m., the Capitulars assembled in the orator next to the room of the Ven. Founder, where, after the invocation of the Holy Spirit, with the **Veni, Creator**, Fr. Mark Bassi delivered the prescribed discourse, for the Election of the Superior General; when this was finished, and after a brief prayer in private, all the Capitulars entered the room of the Father Founder, to proceed to the Election.

There were 14 present.

The ballots were distributed, and collected, according to the prescriptions, and the following were nominated:

Rev. Fr. Peter Vignola with Seven Votes

Rev. Fr. Joseph Sembianti with Five Votes.



Chapter 11 Fr. Vincent in Retirement

Fr. Vincent had worked for a long time. In all the years, he applied himself with tireless assiduity. He was a faithful laborer, who served God joyfully, evening those most bitter [54] and sad times, that would ordinarily break even a soul of bronze. Those very sacrifices that he joyfully undertook, as well as his many and varied cares demanded in his role as Superior of a House that had such a diversified program, had taken their toll on him. His brother, Fr. Peter, the Superior General, recalled him to Verona, with the idea of giving him a little rest to restore his failing health.

On his arrival back in Verona, however, despite his ailments that became increasingly worse, he was resolved to make the best use of his retirement. He cordially, and I might say, avidly, accepted every effort to preach, to hear Confessions, to instruct and to help out in any way. With his great solicitude, he would go to hear Confessions, either in the house, or outside. He went to religious houses, schools and colleges, and to all, he was an Angel of God. In his benign and

Rev. Fr. Francis Benciolini with one vote.

Rev. Fr. Chalres Zara with one vote.

Therefore, no one obtained more than half of the votes.

The Vote was repeated on those nominated, with the same number voting, and the result was:

Rev. Fr. Peter Vignola with Seven Votes

Rev. Fr. Joseph Sembianti with Six Votes⁷.

Rev. Fr. Charles Zara with One vote.

No one was elected.

A THIRD vote was taken with the same result.

A FOURTH Vote was taken, still with the identical results.

A FIFTH vote was taken, still with the same results.

A SIXTH vote was heard, but this was no different in its result⁷.

At this point⁷, Fr. Vincent Vignola arrived, and a SEVENTH vote was taken:

Voting 15

The following were nominated:

Rev. Fr. Peter Vignola with Eight votes. [foot-note continued on next page]

Rev. Fr. Joseph Sembianti with Six Votes⁷.

Rev. Fr. Charles Zara with One vote.

THEREFORE: SINCE THE VERY **REV. PETER VIGNOLA** OBTAINED MORE THAN HALF OF THE VOTES, HE WAS PROCLAIMED BY THE VICAR OF THE CONGREGATION, AS THE LEGITIMATE SUPERIOR, AND THE DUE REVERENCE WAS PAID TO HIM BY THE VICAR, BY THE SECRETARY, AND BY THE ASSISTANT, AND BY ALL THE OTHERS IN ORDER.

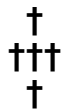
serene manner, he would bring joy and peace. He was even jubilant when he was able to do some good. He never spared himself when it was a matter of the spiritual good of his neighbor.

As he was well along in years, it cost him a great deal to maintain discipline, especially among the young boys of the early high school classes. Nevertheless, he agreed to teach Religion to them. His patience with these boys, who at times were totally undisciplined, bordered on the heroic. He remained always meek, kind and amiable toward all.

One day, the Dean of Studies entered his class room while Fr. Vincent was teaching Religion. Seeing him more serious than usual, he was asked: 'Have the boys bothered you?' He answered that they had, 'perhaps a little too much.' He was then asked what had happened. He began by saying, 'some of them...' – but, was interrupted and was asked for the names. He then turned to the students and said: 'Be good now, otherwise next time I will tell them.' He was truly a model of goodness, meekness and kindness.

Notwithstanding his failing health, Fr. Vincent lived 'retirement' in these occupations from 1886 until April 19, 1889.

This type of retirement can very well be compared to that time [55] in the life of our Divine Master, shortly before His Sorrowful Passion. Our beloved Fr. Vincent was being prepared for his Ascent to Mount Calvary.



Chapter 12 From the Pulpit to His Death-bed

A debilitating heart ailment had threatened the life of Fr. Vincent, and each day it was more of a concern.

On the evening of Good Friday, April 19, 1889, a Priest was scheduled to preach in the Church of the Stimmate. A few days before, this Priest had not been feeling well. In the sermon for that night, he was to ascend Calvary, meditate on the Agony of Christ, and preach on the Seven Last Words. Fr. Vincent seemed very unhappy when it was decided to look for a substitute and no one thought of asking him. Finally, he made his willingness known to the Superiors. He was overjoyed when they accepted his offer, and he set himself to the task of preparing for the devout service.

His first brief sermon, I would say, he gave with extraordinary effort and fervor. It was, though, a supreme effort, and an outlet for his inner piety, the last flicker of a light that was going out. When he got up to speak on the Second Last

Word, he seemed drained. He struggled to his feet, his voice was very weak, and he was seen frequently mopping his brow with his handkerchief – but, he continued on.

Then the sad and mournful verse was sung: *‘When death with its fearsome grasp – comes to carry off my life – then, o Lord, come to me!’* At this moment, he suffered a paralysis of his left side, that soon was general. One of the Students went up to him and whispered: ‘Father, you are not well- come down!’ He answered; ‘I’ll be all right, just bring me a glass of water.’ He was too long accustomed to struggling against his indispositions. However, his sacrifice was not consummated.

With the Feast of the Mystery of the Cross he had begun his Priestly life long years before in St. Stephen’s Church. Now, preaching on these mysteries of the Cross, he concluded it at the Stimate.

He was taken from the pulpit, and carried off in a chair to his bed. As he was being carried along, he joked and said: ‘Take good care of this arm-chair ... for heaven’s sake!’

Every possible care was administered to him. The doctor drew some blood from him, which seemed to help somewhat. He was in such good humor, it was as though he was trying to hide his true condition. His Confessor asked if he would care to go to Confession, and he said he would most willingly. He received this sacrament in full possession of his faculties.

After 9:00 p.m., the doctor returned, and found that his condition had gravely worsened. It was then decided to bring him Viaticum. However, this was delayed, as Fr. Vincent was disturbed by period of vomiting, that lasted until about 10:00 p.m.

It seemed that these spells had passed and his Confessor asked if he wanted to receive Holy Communion. He answered that he did, and the Priest went to the nearby Chapel to bring it. However, when he returned to the room with the Sacrament, Fr. Vincent’s mouth was clamped shut, and he seemed to have lapsed into unconsciousness. Extreme Unction was then administered, and the prayers for a departing soul were begun. About mid-night, he entered into his last agony, that gradually became worse until sunset of the following day.

It was now Holy Saturday, about the time when the *Regina Caeli* was to be sung. In the space of 24 hours, Fr. Vincent had passed from the pulpit to his death. He rendered his soul back to God, amidst the sorrow and grief of his confreres, who were gathered around his bed.

We will refrain here from mentioning the grief that his sudden death brought to so many in Verona, Trent and Parma, among Stigmatines and all those who had come to know the beloved deceased. I will close here stating that the memory of Fr. Vincent and the love that was had for him, will remain unchanged in the minds and

hearts of all. What power, what amiability and what force there was in that Priest to bind hearts!

One of his admirers states: 'If it were possible, I would have encased him in gold!'. Another remarked: 'to please him, I would have done anything. He inspired me with his rectitude of soul, with his unstained and meek heart; he always thought of the good of others, and was incapable of thinking evil of anyone!'

He was truly worthy of the honor that Verona paid him the morning of his funeral, on April 22nd. The last tribute was devout and moving. Many members of the Clergy were present, many representatives of Religious Institutes, as well as a large number of the faithful. The general consensus was: Verona and the Congregation of the Priests of the Stigmata had suffered a great loss. He was a gem, who was all the more lovable, for his modest and unassuming ways.

May his rare virtues remain deeply impressed on our minds and hearts, and may they always inspire us to imitate them.

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