

Collection of Documents

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MAGDALENE OF CANOSSA - FOUNDRESS

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MARIA NICOLAI

**MAGDALENE OF CANOSSA**  
**and**  
**THE GENESIS OF THE RULE**  
**OF THE CANOSSIAN DAUGHTERS**  
**OF CHARITY**

Rome 1991

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## PRESENTATION

The volume *"Magdalene of Canossa and the Genesis of the Rule of the Daughters of Charity"* is part of the "Documentation Series" started in 1986, with the aim to make the Spirit of the Foundress better known and to promote its implementation for a dynamic fidelity in present day history.

Through a careful research among the sources in the Archives and bibliographic documentation, the author, Sr. Maria Nicolai, reconstructed the long and difficult path trod by Magdalene of Canossa to make her intuitions, initially felt as "an imaginary dream", a real and fecund gift to the Church and to mankind.

There emerges an interesting network of personal, ecclesial and political events, of relationships, of exchanges and evaluations through which Magdalene recognizes, reads and interprets God's plan, one which involves and transcends her and becomes a way of life, not only for herself but also for other women called like her to consecrate themselves to a mission of love in a religious community.

This work highlights the originality of the charism of charity contemplated in Christ Crucified, the supreme norm, which Magdalene of Canossa welcomes as a gift to be incarnated in the historical and cultural context in which the Institute started and expanded; a gift that becomes a "blue print" for life, that is, a Rule that unleashes all our evangelical dynamism, gearing it towards the "sanctification of the Sisters in the full exercise of charity".

It can be useful for us, in this historical time when we are called to deepen the essential values of the religious apostolic life on the eve of the reprinting of the Rule of Life, to study again in humility and trust, the steps taken by our saintly Foundress to give life to "our least Institute" in fidelity both to the charism received and to our contemporary society.

All this with the consoling certainty: "Unless a wheat grain falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest" (Jn 12:24).

M. Elide Testa  
*Superior General*

Rome, December 23, 1990

## PREFACE

This study

Maria Nicolai

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## CHAPTER I

### AN "IMAGERY DREAM"

During the period between 1799 and 1808, God prepares Magdalene of Canossa to become the guide of an institution, which initially conceived as a "dream", will acquire the contours of a marvelous reality. These are years during which, docile to the inspiration from above, and detached from herself, Magdalene tries to attune herself to God's wavelength and to study the founders who preceded her as well as her contemporaries.

From the beginning of the spiritual direction of Don L. Libera<sup>1</sup> the young Marchioness definitively abandons the prospects of the cloister and of the Carmelite monastery<sup>2</sup> and grows in a vocation which, through a deep intimate union with God, opens her to charity towards the neighbour at all social levels.

Referring to these years, she writes:

*"Meanwhile, during one of those first years, while attending Holy Mass, as the priest read a scriptural text from the book of Tobit, she felt an interior impulse to dedicate herself to works of charity to all those allowed by her state of life ... and committed herself to do so. . . "*<sup>3</sup>.

Magdalene discovers the plan of God, who wants her to be in an attitude of total dedication. Family ties impede the fulfilment of her vocation for several years. In fact she writes:

*"She remained at home, but the bond with her family became so strong that, for many years, she could not even think of leaving".*<sup>4</sup>

#### Jesus Crucified: the Exemplar

The glory and the will of God, the imitation of Jesus crucified become the norm of Magdalene's life. In her Memoirs, she puts together two extraordinary moments of her life: in the first, most probably around Easter 1795 or 1799, she experiences Jesus Crucified as the Exemplar of her personal life:

*"During Holy Week, while reading in a small meditation book the verse: "Inspice et fac secundum exemplar etc." she felt a strong interior feeling, which lasted for several days, and urged her to follow Jesus Crucified, but without understanding anything in particular..."*<sup>5</sup>

In the second moment, that of 1811, she experiences Christ himself as the inspiration for the "Rules" written for the Daughters of Charity.

*"...during prayer, six or seven months before going to Venice for this work, she had a similar experience, but not as intense or as deep as before, but only an intellectual enlightenment, and she*

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<sup>1</sup> Don. Luigi was born in Verona in 1737 and ordained a priest in 1760. He died the ordinary confessor for the Convent of St. Teresa under which he has been of primary importance in Magdalene's formation. In fact, he guided her from 1791 till the period of her vocation discernment to seek the Lord through a deep asceticism and an intense prayer life.

<sup>2</sup> EXPERIENCE OF LIFE IN THE CLOISTER : IN 1791, Magdalene entered the monastery of St. Teresa in Verona, where she remained for about eight or ten months. This is confirmed by two letters, the first to her aunt Matilde Canossa dated May 4, 1791 (cf. M d C, *Epistolario*, by E Dossi, III/5 p 13X ó) — and the other dated Nov IX, 1791 to Fr Federici (cf. M d C Ep 1, p 2). The second attempt was when she entered the Monastery of the Discalced Carmelites in Conegliano Veneto where she remained only three days. (cf. M. . Regole e s( *Z i Spil ituali* a cura di E. Dossi, Part I a, p.3 18)

<sup>3</sup> MdC, R.s.s., P la, 319

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> ibid, pp. 319-320

*believes that it was then she thought of taking the virtues of Christ Crucified as the inspiration for the Rules of the Daughters of Charity "*<sup>6</sup>

These are two very important moments in the charismatic experience of Magdalene because they clearly show that Jesus Crucified is the true inspiration of the Rules of the Institute.

She follows the divine initiative with docility and lets herself be led, abandoning herself totally to God's will.

"The intense activity within her family did not hinder her from doing much even outside. One is amazed to find Magdalene of Canossa's name associated with all the religious and charitable activities promoted in the city. She was present in any charitable venture, not only as collaborator in someone else's initiatives, but often also as the intelligent initiator and promotor. She wanted to do good to all and in all possible ways. She tried to do it with a big heart and an open spirit."<sup>7</sup>

In the Memoirs we read:

*"This person had been thinking for a long time of an institution with the purpose of gathering some girls and visiting the hospital. She believes that she also thought that the persons involved in such institution should seek their own sanctification too. Since all is appeared to her just as an imaginary dream, nothing more than a passing thought, for a long time she did not disclose it even to her spiritual director. Rather, she continued to carry on the transactions for the foundation of the Monastery of the Discalced,<sup>8</sup> with a certain interior dislike, if she correctly remembers.*

*The morning in which the transactions had to be finalized, feeling **restless, she manifested her other project to her Spiritual Director who ordered her to cut off immediately any further dealings regarding the foundation of the Discalced and to dedicate herself to the other project.**"<sup>9</sup>*

#### A "Plan" of Charity

The draft of the first document written by Magdalene herself, which is without date or title, and goes under the name "Plan",<sup>10</sup> in all probability dates back to 1799.

In such a Plan, "Magdalene visualizes the Idea as an architectural plan, divided into various sections, where the different activities of the men Religious and of the Women work together for the benefit of education, instruction and assistance of souls, saved from evil."<sup>11</sup>

The date of this document is confirmed by two letters written to her by her Director, Don L. Libera, on July 5 and December 14, 1799:

*"The plan, my daughter... has to be carried out with prudence and discretion and it must be easily carried out."<sup>12</sup>*

*"The plan has to be sustained, but it is necessary we adapt ourselves to circumstances and promote it little by little, because everything has small beginnings."<sup>13</sup>*

We have another confirmation in a letter written about 20 years later to A. Rosmini<sup>14</sup>, when Magdalene presents to him the Plan for the foundation of the Sons of Charity, the Institute that, due to various historical

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<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> M. Giacomini, *Magdalene of Canossa - her charitable and educational apostolate*, ed. Kevin Burns Pty. Ltd., Brisbane, 1975, pp. 76-77.

<sup>8</sup> Magdalene of Canossa has agreed with Don Libera to establish a monastery of Carmelites in Verona.

<sup>9</sup> M.d.c., R.s.s., P. I a, p. 320.

<sup>10</sup> M.d.c., Plan B 6-6, Ep. 11/2, pp. 1415-1419. The term "Plan" indicates a document where the aim of the Institute and the works in which its members are engaged are briefly highlighted. Between 1799 and 1828, the year of the Pontifical approval of the final draft of the Rule, Magdalene wrote several Plans, 11 meant to make the guidelines of the Institute known to ecclesiastical and civil Authorities.

<sup>11</sup> T. Piccan, *Sola con Dio solo*. ed. Ancora, Milan, 1966, p. 881

<sup>12</sup> L. Libera, a M. .C.. 5 luglio 1799, Ep. 111/5, p. 4231.

<sup>13</sup> L. Libera, a M. .C., 14 dicembre 1799, Ep. 111/5, p. 4234.

circumstances was established only several years after that of the Daughters of Charity. But the idea of an institution for women and men was already in her dream twenty years before:

*"Know that ... hat idea, and the guidelines I presented to you in writing, were already in my mind 20 years ago, though more confused..."*<sup>15</sup>

The Plan was vast and bold, but the aim was precise: to answer the three fundamental and most urgent needs of our neighbour, which are: education, religious instruction, and assistance to the sick.

In the introduction we read:

*"Some persons, desiring to dedicate themselves to the glory and the service of God, reflecting on the actual circumstances in which the Lord's indignation seems to clearly call for a reform of life, are thinking of starting a Congregation, or Pious Union, whose aim is the fulfilment of the two great Precepts of Charity: to love God and to love one's neighbour; consequently through it to sanctify themselves, and also to meet the needs of their place. Therefore all the Rules, the dispositions, the methods, the practices, both internal and external, must be geared to dedicating all their time to the benefit of their neighbour. In fact, since the Plan of the Congregation contemplates to exercise nearly all the works of Mercy, these persons intend to have as their first and foremost goal the acquisition of perfect love, trying to achieve the most intimate, cordial, familiar and continuous union with God, while working for the benefit of their neighbour, in view of God alone."*<sup>16</sup>

From this introduction to the Plan, the primacy of the religious-spiritual component over that of assistance appears clearly. It is just this component that marks the difference between the Plan of Magdalene of Canossa and the "General Plan of the Brotherhood" written by Fr. Pietro Leonardi.<sup>17</sup>

Magdalene speaks of women

*"...who... intend to live together under the direction of a Superior who depends directly on the Bishop; and, there, according to their vocation, they will attend to one of the abovementioned tasks."*<sup>18</sup>

For the women, the need to educate the vagrant and abandoned girls takes primacy, in this first Plan, over the other needs: "Christian instruction" and "assistance to the sick".<sup>19</sup>

The new vocational orientation needs God's light as well as the support of the ecclesial Authority; for this reason Don Libera approves the journey of Magdalene to Ferrara for a meeting with Cardinal Mattei<sup>20</sup> and encourages her to speak about her plan with the Vicar General of Verona<sup>21</sup>:

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<sup>14</sup> Fr. A. Rosmini born in Rovereto (Trent) on March 24, 1797, died in Stresa on July 1, 1855. He was a philosopher, theologian and the Founder of the Institutes of Rosminian Fathers and Rosminian Sisters. According to Magdalene of Canossa, he should have been the initiator of the Canossian Sons of Charity.

<sup>15</sup> M.d.C., a A. Rosmini, 3 ottobre 1821, Ep. IU2, p. 756.

<sup>16</sup> M.d.C., Piano B6-6, Ep. II/2, pp. 1415-1416.

<sup>17</sup> Don Pietro. Leonardi was born in Verenna in 1769 and ordained a priest in 1794. Visiting the sick in the Hospital of Mercy, he soon became aware of their moral hygienic and physical conditions. He tried to remedy the situation with the foundation of the "Brotherhood" for the gratuitous assistance of the sick. In 1796. Members of this association were: ecclesiastics and lay people men and women nobles and common people. In 1799 he opened the Institute of "Ramighelli" to help young boys. In 1809 he founded the Institute of the "Daughters of Jesus" to care for girls who were poor and in danger.

<sup>18</sup> M.d.C. Piano B. 6-6 Ep. 11/2 p. 1418.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.* cf. pp. 1417-1419.

<sup>20</sup> Cardinal Mattei was Archbishop of Ferrara: in Italy, especially in the Venetian region he was considered as the future Austrian candidate for the Conclave. (cf. T. Piccari *op. cit.* p. 212).

<sup>21</sup> At the time the Vicar General of Verona was Mugs. Gualfardo Ridolfi. Magdalene spoke to him about the "Plan" when, in the fall of 1799 he was a guest at the Canossa's Grezzano Villa Gualfardo Ridolfi was born in Verona on Nov. 3 1741; and died in Rimini in November 1818. He embraced the ecclesiastical career and received the title of Canon of

*"...I approve of the journey to Ferrara in order to obtain light and direction, as well as protection, from such a holy cardinal, since the Lord could also raise him to a higher position, in which case he would be of great help."*<sup>22</sup>

And in the Memoirs we read:

*"She had been advised to speak to the Vicar General of the Diocese about her Plan, but he encouraged her to talk to the Bishop<sup>23</sup> who partly approved of the plan, but advised her to work on her own and not with the priest she had intended to; he promised to pray, but was against the visits to the hospitals, and suggested instead the charity schools..."*<sup>24</sup>.

After the colloquy with the Bishop, Msgr. Giovanni Avogadro, Magdalene, following his advice, started her charitable works by gathering some little girls, leaving aside for the time being the assistance to the sick:

*"Regarding the Work, she abandoned the assistance to the Hospital as a branch of the Work, and started to gather some abandoned girls in moral danger, whom she placed under the care of a teacher in a rented house. She could rarely visit them due to the distance and being extremely tied down with family responsibilities; however, she continued, as far as possible, to visit the Hospital as a Lady of the League of Friends..."*<sup>25</sup>.

Since the Plan was very vast and not yet very well defined, it was wise to start from what was most necessary.

Don Libera too encourages her to start with the educational project:

*"I am not in disagreement, rather I strongly exhort you, and even command you to work as much as possible for the institution of these girls. Besides the two, may be others will be added, and it is not out of place also to accept for instruction girls who return to their homes, in order to have some help for the beginning; it is certainly necessary to see that they are very young, have honest parents and sufficient means."*<sup>26</sup>

Thus the seed of the great Canossian Work was already sown in July 1799: to gather girls and open schools for them. This is confirmed in the "Memo to Count Mellerio".<sup>27</sup> In this report we find the complete genesis of the Institute:

*"It is about twenty years", writes Magdalene in 1818, "that, called by the Divine Goodness to assist the poor, besides continuing the visits to the sick in the hospital with the Pious Union of the Hospitaller Ladies, ("Dame Ospitaliere") I started also to gather a few little girls in danger, putting them in a rented house under the care of a Teacher, who, animated by the same spirit, was helping me with their education. I have been presiding over this in the way permitted by the duties I have towards my Family, with whom I was still living, with the wish since then to continue simply in this charitable work."*<sup>28</sup>

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177(). He had been Vicar General of the Diocese of Verona and was consecrated Bishop of Rimini in Milan Dec. 27. 1807.

<sup>22</sup> Don Libera, a M.d.C., 5 luglio 1799, Ep. III/5, p. 4230.

<sup>23</sup> The Bishop of Verona was Giovanni Andrea Avogadro. Born in 1735 in Verona, he entered the Company of Jesus at a very young age, and became one of the most renowned preachers. After the suppression of the Jesuits, he moved back to Verona. He had been Bishop of this city from 1790 till 1804, when he renounced the bishopric to join again the Society of Jesus. He died in Padua in 1815.

<sup>24</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P.Ia, p. 320.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid*, p. 321

<sup>26</sup> L. Libera a M.d.C., 5 luglio 1799, p. 4231.

<sup>27</sup> Count Mellerio is one of the Institute's benefactors. For biographical information cf. M.d.C., Ep. I, pp. 622-623.

<sup>28</sup> M.d.C., Pro-memoria al Conte Mellerio, 25 marzo 1818, Ep. II/1, p. 103..

From these small beginnings, Magdalene proceeds in her work with further attempts. Her tactic is to start "*little by little, avoiding attracting attention.*"<sup>29</sup>

She knows how to remain so well hidden as to make people often think that her work was lacking originality, because she was presenting it under the patronage of some holy apostles of charity and under the inspiration of somebody else's Rules.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> M.d.C., to Durini, 1 March 1801, Ep. I, p. 30.

<sup>30</sup> cf. T. Piccari, op. cit. p. 103, 14.

## CHAPTER II

### FRIENDSHIP AND SIGNIFICANT ENCOUNTERS

#### Her friend, Carolina Durini

Magdalene makes friends with the most varied categories of persons; among them her friendship with Carolina Durini is the most significant<sup>1</sup>.

Their first encounter took place in Verona, at the Mercy Hospital in the fall of 1800.

Providence prepared Magdalene for the institution of the Daughters of Charity through this friendship. The encounter between these two women brought them to realize at once that they shared the same ideas, intentions and aspirations. From then started a continuous exchange of cordial and intimate letters in which Magdalene reveals her soul and offers to the reader, the possibility to follow the various stages of her journey. At the time of the first meeting, Magdalene already had her "Plan" as an initial point of reference. Countess Durini, the governess of the hospitals of Milan, studied the situation; together they made plans and had a first exchange of ideas in confidence. All this is confirmed in the first letter Magdalene wrote to her Milanese friend:

*"As for me, my dear Carolina, I do not have anything else to add after all our agreements. No matter where you will be, in Verona or at the North Pole, my affection and my friendship will never change. Remember, when you talk about our endeavour/...to speak in the third person, when the Glory of God does not require otherwise."*<sup>2</sup>

Magdalene's "Plan" is different from that of the Union of Charity" founded by Don Pietro Leonardi. In relation to it, she writes to Carolina:

*The Congregation of the Religious of the Hospital, after Don Pietro fully recovered from his illness, is revived and strengthened. If you are of the same idea, as you told me, I will ask for the Rules and send you a copy."*<sup>3</sup>

And again:

*"In my last letter, I gave you some news about the Religious of the hospital and about the novices, In this one I will tell you about the situation of my girls... I am carrying out transactions for a suitable house, located almost in front of the Church of the Filippini. The matter is almost concluded and I hope to have finally found a place suitable in every respect, but most of all the spiritual assistance of these girls, under the care of those good Religious of that Pious Congregation, to whom I hope to entrust them. I say also that I am very happy with my companion and with the way she cares for the two girls. I shall keep you informed of eventual happenings. This work must develop with the help of the Blessed Virgin."*<sup>4</sup>

After a month Magdalene writes again:

*"Today is the 3rd of March, finally Cristina moved to the House of the Filippini with the two big girls, and within this week I intend putting the little girl there too. Oh, God, how happy I am. Besides the advantage*

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<sup>1</sup> Carolina Durini was born in Milan in 1762. the daughter of Ludovico Trotti Bentivoglio and Costanza Visconti. She had two sisters, Paola and Teresa, and a brother, Lorenzo Galcazzo. She married Count Carlo Francesco Durini in 1782. She dedicated herself to works of charity. She met Magdalene of Canossa at the hospital of Mercy during one of her frequent journeys that often had a charitable aim. For further information cf MdC..Ep. I, pp 4-5

<sup>2</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 10 novembre, 1800. Ep. 1, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 20 gennaio. 1801. Ep. 1. p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 29 gennaio, 1801, Ep. 1, pp. 14-15.



*of being close to the Filippini the house is beautiful, healthy, with a garden and at a very moderate price.*"<sup>5</sup>

Magdalene's "Plan" circulates in Milan and receives approval. She becomes preoccupied and writes again to her friend asking her not to mention her name when speaking about her projects. At the same time she asks for the Rules of Christian Doctrine of St. Charles. She also confides that, while waiting to see clearly the will of God in regard to her Work, she prepares herself by reading the various Rules, first among them being those written by St. Francis of Sales:

*"Do not betray me, my dear Carolina, when you speak of our plan... It is true that I told you to speak of it freely when you see that this can be useful. But I requested you when it was not necessary or useful, to say that it is of a friend of yours, and not to mention my name... I know that you have at heart the Glory of God... send me the Rules of Christian Doctrine of St. Charles, since I found several parish priests and Religious in charge of Christian doctrine who are ready to use them also...*

*I read in part the Constitutions of the Salesians based on the Work of St. Francis of Sales<sup>6</sup> and I believe that they could be useful for us if our plan succeeds, But till now I have found only those drawn up for the Salesians when they were erected in Religion<sup>7</sup>...*

*My dear Carolina, for the time being we make use of all the material at our disposal leaving the Blessed Virgin to smoothen things bring to completion everything in as cordant e with the Divine Will. I believe, as you say, that we need much Prayed we shall pray, and if the Lord wants from us this holy Work, with patience, courage and time we will succeed."*<sup>8</sup>

Magdalene knew in depth the life and spirituality of St. Francis of Sales. Even Don Luigi Libera, in his spiritual direction of the young Marchioness followed the same criteria of the Rule of the holy Bishop of Geneva, suggesting to her some of the maxims on the love of God and on trust.<sup>9</sup> In the letter of February 18, 1801 to Carolina, she affirms having read the "Constitutions of the Salesians" when they were erected in Religion, and decides to ask for the "first Rules of the Salesians when they were a Congregation without enclosure". In reality these "Rules" never existed. This is stated by St. Francis of Sales himself in the Preface to the Constitutions of the "Sisters of the Visitation in Annecy."<sup>10</sup>

<sup>5</sup> M d C... alla Durini, 1 marzo, I S01, Ep. 1, p. 29.

<sup>6</sup> For biographic information about St. Francis of Sales cf. M.d.C. Ep.1, p. 18 note 8.

<sup>7</sup> Congregation erected in Religion<sup>2</sup> are all the Orders and Institutes of Sisters dedicated to contemplative life with enclosure and solemn vows.

<sup>8</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 18 Febbraio 1801, Ep. I, pp. 23-24.

<sup>9</sup> cf. L.Libera, *Letters of Spiritual Direction* IPL, Milan 1982, p.15

<sup>10</sup> Preface of St. Francis of Sales: "To the Sisters of the Monastery of the Visitation of Annecy"

"There have been in the past, and there are still now two kinds of Congregations of women consecrated to God: the one established with the title of Religion, because they have solemn vows, and the others With the title (*A simple consecration* or with simple vows, or oblation or other forms of sacred Profession ... My dear Sisters, you } Congregation has been null noun (1610-1616) of *this second kind* with many practices of sound piety, for the good of your souls and as a great example for the edification of the neighbour. But since it has pleased Divine Providence that this small company as a hive of mystic bees, would produce new swarms and be established in Lyon and Molins, the Illustrious and Very Rev. Archbishop of Lyon, Msgr. Dionisio Simone of Marquemont *judged it good to hang it under the title of the Religion* .... The Lord blessed this decision, *but at last* after much difficulty... Paul V, our Holy Father, granted me the erection of the House with the status of Religion .... under the Rule of the glorious St. Augustine.

Therefore I present to you this Sacred Rule, so that you will follow it from now on, as the true path, along which you must walk to attain the perfection of Religious Life: and I have added your Constitutions, as many milestones placed along the way, so that you will be better able to walk along it. Evidently, it has been a special Providence of God that among all the Rules, that of the glorious St. Augustine has been chosen to be the rule of your Company. In fact, by a secret impulse of the Holy Spirit, your Constitutions had been drawn up in such a way as to conform fully to this Holy Rule, which you already observed without thinking, even before it had been enforced, and besides without knowing what it was .... seeing your Congregation though small in number at the beginning, yet great in the desire to grow more and more in the holy love of God and in the renunciation of every other love, I felt obliged to assist it with great care.... If besides this, I had

St. Francis of Sales, in fact, founded the Institute of the Sisters of the Visitation on June 6, 1610, and wrote only the Constitutions which Magdalene read.

Comparing the Rules of the Daughters of Charity with the Rule and Constitutions of the Visitation Sisters, we can see that there is a similarity of a normative nature. But they are substantially different in the spirit which animates them.

In Magdalene's plan, the need for education, catechetical and Christian instruction takes precedence over the assistance to the hospital.

However, feeling unprepared to carry out such a plan, she proposes to Caroline the exchange of rules, projects and plans, in view of concretizing God's plan, and confides in her that she took pains to ensure that the catechetical instruction planned in Verona<sup>11</sup> would correspond to her "great Plan":<sup>12</sup>

*"Let us get down to our business. I like very much your idea about the method of the Hospital that is, of your Company. I see that it is more useful than Ours, which, for us Worsen, is limited to feeding the sick, as you have seen...."*

*Don Pietro Leonardi is preparing to start, within a few days, Catechism for the servants, and I hope that the book you sent me will be useful.... He is coming to see me one of these days, therefore I will write to you later about the way I believe we can arrange the religious instruction so as to make it coincide with the great Plan without showing it".<sup>13</sup>*

In her Plan, Magdalene says in this regard:

*"Let us now go on to speak about the way to answer the second need: Christian instruction. Generally speaking, in our Diocese, considering the vigilance of the Superiors and the zeal of the Parish Priests, it seems that the persons who are greatly in need of it fall under two categories. The domestics who serve in the city, who miss the parish catechism, since their masters are accustomed to a late lunch, and many of them live in incredible ignorance; and some of the country people... This Congregation intends to provide for the needs of the first category by holding catechism classes every Sunday at an hour most suitable to these servants, in the Church that will be chosen as the usual meeting place."<sup>14</sup>*

Magdalene began to put into practice personally and in a limited way in her family what was a project in the "great Plan" as she herself calls it. The verb "began to teach" found in the following passage of the Memoirs betrays such realization:

*"...while reciting the psalm "Miserere", at the verse "Docebo iniquos etc.", she felt urged to instruct her neighbour, and she began, therefore, to teach catechism every Sunday, and to explain it to the maidservants whom she could not send to church".<sup>15</sup>*

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confirmed with my authority, your way of serving the Lord, I only did what was to be done, as explicitly declared by our Holy Father Paul V, when granting beautiful and ample Indulgences to your Congregation he said: *As long as it is approved and exerted with the authority of the Bishop ... Vise Fsan(is of Sales by God's grace and the will of the Apostolic Holy See, Bishop and Prince of Geneva, and delega, of our Holy Father, Paul V, /o} the erection establishment and institution of the Monastery of the Visitation under the Rule of St. Augustine, have drawn up ze-examined and approved the alsose-v.}~ittell Constitutions (the old text of the Constitutions), enjoining and commanding by my authority, or rather by the Apostolic Authority given to me in this regard, that these Constitutions are to be Perpetually and inviolably observed and kept in the said Monastery and by all the Sisters belonging to it.*

Given in Annecy on Oct. 4, 1618 (cf. Rules of St. Augustine and Constitutions - For the Religious Sisters of the Visitation - according to the original manuscripts - Version of the French text - Rome - Turin Ed. Pontificia Marietti - Founded in 1820 - pp. 10-14, 38-41 and 71).

<sup>11</sup> This is the project of Don Pietro Leonardi and Magdalene of Canossa

<sup>12</sup> This indicates Plan B. 6-6

<sup>13</sup> cf. M.d.C. Ep 11/1 pp 1415-1419

<sup>14</sup> M.d.C., Plan B.6-6, Ep. 11/2, p. 1417.

<sup>15</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. 1, p. 319.

When Magdalene comes to know that a person<sup>16</sup> in Milan is contemplating a plan similar to hers, she becomes enthusiastic, because that appears to her as a sign of the Will of God, and she wants to meet this person immediately to be able to work with her but the encounter does not seem possible. So she pleads with her Milanese friend to find out whether the project is about the education of girls and the assistance to the sick and if it is for both sexes, as contemplated in her first plan:

*"I cannot explain sufficiently how great has been my joy in learning that in Milan there is a person who has an idea similar to mine. My dear Carolina, it seems to me to discover in this that God wants something. If this person comes to Verona, you would give me the greatest of gifts in procuring a meeting with her. she can be assured that secrecy will be very prudently observed. You already know that I have the rules of some groups of the Sacred Virgins in line with that of the Ursuline Sisters, and I have been promised those of the Hospitallers. If we can get acquainted, I believe that we can help each other, myself, giving her all the rules that I wish he able to get, and she with her example and the direction... If you see that this is impossible, find out at least whether her Plan considers only the education of the "abandoned girls" or also assistance in the Hospital, whether it embraces our own sex, or it is extended to both sexes as it does in mine."*<sup>17</sup>

Since she has not received an answer she insists

*"Please give me some news about that person who contemplates that Plan similar to mine. Only to know about it, to think of it, fills me with the greatest joy."*<sup>18</sup>

And again:

*"I hope that the known person will not be frightened by the obstacles which surfaced in the execution of the longed for Plan. Nothing is more evident and inalterable than great obstacles when works for God's Glory are at stake. Rather, I believe that if there were none, one should be afraid, because it seems that the devil is indifferent, that is, not afraid of anything. I Confess to be very eager to hear from you about this topic and that you tell me all you can about it."*<sup>19</sup>

Magdalene agrees with Carolina that it would be opportune to give to "that person" her Plan and she adds that knowing that the said person was not a learned one gave her a greater guarantee that the work was coming from the Lord:

*"Regarding what you think about that person, who contemplates a Plan like mine, you must know that it appears that your mind and mine are one. I too have been thinking that it would be very useful, in order to find out and perhaps combine ideas, to show her my Plan... I believe that since this person is not a learned one, this is a greater proof that such a Work comes from God, because there is less of what is human. I hope that Divine Providence will conduct everything according to God's Will."*<sup>20</sup>

And again:

*"You can easily imagine with what great pleasure I received the results of the encounter with the known person... I am convinced that Fr. De Vecchi<sup>21</sup> is not far from granting the desired foundation with time,*

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<sup>16</sup> This person has not been Identified since she is always referred to without giving the name.

<sup>17</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 21 aprile, 1801, Ep. 1, pp. 47-48.

<sup>18</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 28 aprile, 1801. Ep. 1, p. 50

<sup>19</sup> M.d.C. alla Durini, 6 Maggio 1801, Ep. 1, p. 5 .

<sup>20</sup> M.d.C. alla Durini, 14 maggio, 1801, Ep. 1, p. 54.

<sup>21</sup> Fr. Luigi Valdani, writing about the life of his confrere, Fr. Felice De Vecchi, affirms in this regard: "... for many years he had at heart to establish a Congregation of the Daughters of Charity, similar to that erected by St. Vincent de Paul in France. Because of this he had been frequently exchanging letters with a very worthy and virtuous person, who was

*having heard that he gives her permission to write. I hope you Will continue giving me news about her resolutions. Meanwhile I thank you very much for everything and I will read with great joy the rules and the Plan. g the Lord blesses our project, the first will be very useful “.*<sup>22</sup>

Finally Carolina sends her the Plan of that person so eagerly waited for:

*"Oh my dear- Carolina, what great joy I felt in reading that Plan so much in keeping with my ideas..."*<sup>23</sup>

After a week, Magdalene asks again for clarifications:

*"Tell me, please, is the Institution of this person, that is, the Plan you sent me, ... the one of St. Vincent, amplified? I also ask you to enquire about the method they more or less follow in the community when they are not With the girls, since, in order to keep alive so perfect an Exercise of Charity, an interior life very much united with (God is certainly required, also to check the great distractions, inseparable from that vocation. It is true that in the evening when school is over, the girls go home; so also at midday, but I am also curious to see if we have the same understanding in this regard."*<sup>24</sup>

### **The attraction of a Work in Mantua**

From the correspondence of Magdalene with her friend Carolina, we discover how Magdalene, always attentive to see the Will of God in the events of life, was just as ready to put into action every attempt she deemed valid for the realization of her apostolic aspirations. The encounter with Fr. Domenico Bellavite dates back to 1801.<sup>25</sup>

The charitable work of Fr. Bellavite attracts the attention of Magdalene because it seems helpful for her work. Thus she writes to Carolina:

*"I hope to go to Mantua soon to talk to Fr. Bellavite, to see his Orphanage for girls and have his opinion...."*<sup>26</sup>

On her return from Mantua, Magdalene describes to her Milanese friend with great enthusiasm her meeting with Fr. Bellavite and his work:

*"...I tell you that I had the good fortune to speak on two occasions with Fr. Bellavite who has been so kind as to show me everything in his Orphanage for girls and to fully satisfy all my questions .... I assure*

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thinking of it in Vicenza and was already drawing up the Constitutions for it But due to circumstances of time and the lack of the necessary means, the vast project was not actualized then ..." (L Valdani Vita del P. de Vecchi, pp. 115-116)

We shall go back to this matter when we shall speak about the relationship between Fr. Felice De Vecchi and Magdalene of Canossa.

<sup>22</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 27 maggio, 1801, Ep. 1, pp. 56-57.

<sup>23</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 2 giugno, 1801, Ep. 1. p 59

<sup>24</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 5 giugno, 1801, Ep. I, pp 61-62.

<sup>25</sup> Fr Domenico Bellavite was born in Verona in 1753. In 1784, by then a priest he asked and obtained permission to join the Congregation of the Filippini Fathers in Mantua. When the Congregation was suppressed he remained in the city of Mantua, dedicating himself to the education of the poor and abandoned boys and girls.

In the Preface to the Rules, we read: "Since the year 1796, I have established a private Orphanage to receive poor abandoned girls (cf Manuscript "Rules of monastic life for the Daughters of Mary - Archives - Generalate of the Maestre Dorotee - Vicenza).

In 1801 he opened a new House under the title of "House of poor abandoned girls" and wrote the "Regulations for a House erected in Mantua in 1801 where abandoned girls are received to be educated in the Religious Duties and trained in the work proper to their condition. They were printed in Verona in 1803.

In 1809, Fr. Bellavite founded also the "Pious Institute of the Daughters of Mary" and wrote the Rules quoted above. He died in Mantua in 1821. In March 1859, the Pious Institute of the Daughters of Mary takes the name of Ursuline of Mantua. In 1972, the Ursuline of Mantua merged with the Maestre Dorotee of the Farina Institute of Vicenza.

<sup>26</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 6 maggio, 1801, Ep. I, p 52

*you that to talk with him is the same as to talk with a saint. The house is so clean and so much like a monastery that one could not wish for anything else .... The girls some weave, others learn cutting and sewing and other similar works; all learn reading writing and arithmetic. There are Shoe teachers. Between the two orphanages, I believe that he has to support more than one hundred people The Lord blesses his faith and sanctity, providing I would say, day by day, sustenance for all. Truly I had a perfect occasion to understand my nothingness under every aspect. He told me to take great courage and gave me the permission to write to him as much as I like, so that I have the possibility to get whatever light I wish very easily.<sup>27</sup>*

And again she asks for prayer:

*"... pray and make others pray for me, my dear friend, because going through Mantua I wish to present to Fr. Bellavite a proposal, for which **much** prayer is needed. It has the aim of giving a solid foundation to the Institution of the girls both on my part as well as on his. This, my dear Carolina, is one of my thoughts which coincides with my first idea<sup>28</sup> of which you already have a written outline..."<sup>29</sup>*

A week later, the new encounter with Fr. Bellavite renewed hopes and doubts in Magdalene's heart:

*".. I spoke twice with Fr. Bellavite: we agree perfectly on the whole, but did not reach any conclusion except that we should pray much. I left with him all my papers and on my return from Parma we will come to some Conclusions..."<sup>30</sup>*

Magdalene, concerned about the negative outcome in life of the girls who come from orphanages, feels that it is not enough just to gather the girls. She realizes that the problem of educators is more urgent. She confides in her friend about the project submitted to Fr. Bellavite in order to get her opinion:

*"Finally, let us talk a little about Fr. Bellavite. Listen to my project and tell me what you think about it I proposed to Father a thing which I believe we already discussed between us. It seems to me that gathering girls together is a small matter that is done in many Places, but to educate them and obtain good results in the sense of preparing good Christians and mothers of families of those who come from Orphanages; this is not frequently seen here. I think that this is due to the lack of persons who dedicate themselves to education out of love for God and as their vocation. Besides, since a certain number of persons dedicated to this is not available, the continuous change of personnel brings about many different ideas that necessarily disturb the good education even in well conducted orphanages. I proposed to him therefore, to establish, next to the orphanage, a Retreat where some teachers are formed for this purpose."<sup>31</sup>*

The suggestion proposed to Fr. Bellavite to form Christian teachers is a dream that Magdalene will keep for about two decades, when, after the first attempt in Verona at the end of 1811, it will become, in 1822, one of the five ministries of charity.<sup>32</sup>

In two successive letters, Magdalene continues:

*"We now speak of Fr. Bellavite. After proposing and convincing him of my idea about the formation of these teachers I offered to join him if he decides to establish a union under his immediate direction and when I am sure that this is the Will of God when my brother gets married and Carlino will be put under the care of a teacher. Note that he has some ladies who are Widows and are quite determined to join him.*

<sup>27</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 2 giugno, 1801. Ep. 1, pp. 58-59

<sup>28</sup> it is still the Plan B. 6-6, cf. M.d.C. Ep. 11/2, pp. 1415-1419.

<sup>29</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 22 luglio, I SO I, Ep. 1, pp. 72-73.

<sup>30</sup> M.d.C. alla Durini. 28 luglio, 1801. Ep. 1. p. 74.

<sup>31</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 27 settembre, 1801, Ep. 1, p. 83.

<sup>32</sup> cf. E Pollonara Seminars for teachers at the beginning of the Institute, Ed. S.G.S. Istituto Pio XI, Rome 1986.

*We are thinking of remaining in secular dress of obtaining the first Rules of the Salesians<sup>33</sup> and of adding to the education of these girls the visits to the sick. What do you think? We then decided to pray much and to wait for the Will of God to be manifested through the events. It seems to me that in this way we would be starting on solid grounds.<sup>34</sup>*

*"Note that the matter is not resolved but only discussed since it will take time for the situation in my family to be settled and most of all for me to see clearly what is the Will of God. In such a case this is what I think. To continue meanwhile to carry out my work as much as possible. Either the endeavour here succeeds and One established it no longer needs my help and I can go with Fr. Bellavite to help him in the formation of the Institution which must sustain his girls and mine; or the Institution is established here as it could be done in Mantua and God sends me some other widow companions with whom to accomplish the same things here and I remain here. If the thing here remains small limited without a sound beginning as it is now I go to Mantua with my girls and teachers. This is a matter which requires much prayer."<sup>35</sup>*

The silence of Carolina, who does not agree with the idea of merging the Work in Verona with that of Mantua, other providential encounters and the reading of the Regulations of the Work of Fr. Bellavite concur in helping Magdalene understand that the Will of God for her is another, even if the Marchioness continues to admire the work in Mantua and the sanctity of its founder. When Magdalene sends to her friend the "Regulations" written by Fr. Bellavite, she comments that she finds the norms too rigid for her girls:

*"... I want to send you the printed Rules of Fr. Bellavite<sup>36</sup> Perhaps they could in part help you for the plan of the Converts; if not you win at least have an idea of the sanctity of the person who wrote them<sup>37</sup> Also to me his Rules seem full of the Spirit of God and they clearly show the heart of the one who wrote them. But to tell you the truth certainly due to my weakness they seem to me too perfect for girls. In spite of this I say that his sanctity will help to put them into Practice in more ways than one. This is because the Lord will grant success to what he does, and since he is the confessor of all the teachers and girls you can see how much easier it is to imbue them with the same spirit. I did not deal closely with those teachers with the exception of the Prioress whom I know to be a soul full of God of charity and creativity as described by the Rules.<sup>38</sup> What surprised me and gave me great pleasure this year in this Institution has been the great veneration and admirable dependence that all have towards the Prioress."<sup>39</sup>*

In Magdalene, "the desire to work in collaboration with others and under their guidance was always surfacing. She also made some attempts to realize this wish, but fortunately everything remained only at project

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<sup>33</sup> For the Rules of the Salesians cf. note 10.

<sup>34</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 4 ottobre, 1801, Ep. 1, p. 84

<sup>35</sup> M d C. alla Durini, 10 ottobre, 1801, Ep 1, p. 8 .

<sup>36</sup> Cf. note 25. These are the "Regulations of a House erected in Mantua in 1801, the ones Magdalene read and sent also to her friend Carolina Durini.

<sup>37</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 10 luglio, 1803, Ep.I, p. 195

<sup>38</sup> "Duties of the Prioress

1 The Prioress is responsible for the government of the house and for the special care of the girls.

2. She must prudently see that all other persons fulfill their duty properly and exactly, without using authoritative ways but gently asking in order to preserve peace always and a very important mutual trust...

3. An exercise that will be of unspeakable advantage is recommended to the Prioress. This consists in calling all the daughters individually on the day fixed by the rules, and with an open heart and the kindness of one who is a tender and loving mother, examines their soul with them for the peace of their hearts. Not on things in which there may be sin, but on the following, to keep them always in a good disposition. full of joy, to overcome temptations which could arise to disturb the peace of the House and their happiness . . . "

(cf. "Regulations of a House erected ..." pp. 26-27 and note 35).

<sup>39</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 16 ottobre, 1803, Ep. 1, pp. 206-207.

level and initial approach...The Barnabite Felice De Vecchi<sup>40</sup> and Canon Luigi Pacetti helped specially to detach her from the ambiguous situation of subjectuon to Fr. Bellavite. It has been the far-sightedness of these two priests that ensured for Magdalene continuity in the gradual maturation of her mission in the educational apostolate.<sup>41</sup>

### A determining encouragement

It was the same Caroline Durini who put Magdalene always looking for suggestions and help for the realization of her work, in touch with Fr. Felice De Vecchi, her spiritual director and also the one in charge and animator of the whole charitable activity in Milan. While waiting for this meeting, Magdalene writes to Carolina:

*"Meanwhile I feel full of hope .... to have from the very worthy Fr. De Vecchi, news about all of you and your holy Institution. You can imagine how much I will ask him about the whole thing. I will inform you of everything in the next postal delivery Meanwhile I am very happy entertaining this thought and assure you that you have given me a great pleasure".<sup>42</sup>*

Fr. Felice De Vecchi comes to Verona and Magdalene very happily writes to her Milanese friend:

*"Yesterday I had the pleasure of being with him for two hours, and I found him in every respect as you have described him ... I had the joy to have a thorough knowledge of your very holy Institution. Now I am fully satisfied and all my desires have been fulfilled. Oh God! dear Carolina, pray for your Magdalene who lives only on desires. " <sup>43</sup>*

Magdalene, having overcome a critical moment due to the illness of some family members, starts thinking of extending her work; she would like to carry out the old plan" regarding the assistance to the Sack. This is an important step, for which she insistently asks for prayers:

*"Dear Carolina, I am preparing to receive the seventh girl, I ask you to remember this little Work in your prayer to the Lord. A third teacher has been recommended to me. According to what I am told and firm the results shown by some girls educated by her, it could be said that she is one in a hundred thousand But you see how many and varied are the Wonders that this resolution arouses. To be fully open with you, I am thinking that one of the two I already have could come with me to the hospital and in this*

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<sup>40</sup> Fr. Felice De Vecchi (1745-1812), a Barnabite and Parish priest of St. Alexander in Milan, was known and appreciated as an excellent preacher. In Milan, he directed a small group of chosen souls committed in an activity of Christian renewal. Among those directed by him was also Caroline Durini who introduced Fr. De Vecchi to Magdalene of Canossa.

"In Milan, Fr. Felice De Vecchi, a Barnabite priest, has been the coordinator of the Christian resistance against impiety and naturalistic secularism. He has been known in almost all of Italy for his activity as missionary preacher, requested even by the Sovereigns of various Italian states. But it was in his city that he lavished the treasure of a boundless charity, fruit of an intense and fervent interior life.

Precisely in 1801, he founded the Pious Union of Charity for the Major Hospital in Milan. in many aspects similar to the Veronese Fratellanza.

He also began Retreat Houses for repented women and girls in danger, and parochial schools in various parts of the city. Some Milanese women, and most of all, Marchioness Alchonati Visconti, flee Trotti, and her sister Carolina Trotti Durini, have been his collaborators". (G. Casetta, 11 Servo di Dio Don Carlo Steeh. Fondatore delle Sorelle della Misericordia in Verona.

Città del Vaticano, 1964, pp. 116-117).

<sup>41</sup> M. Giacon, op. cit. pp. 90

<sup>42</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 10 febbraio, 1802, Ep. I, p. 113.

<sup>43</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 25 febbraio, 1802, Ep. 1, p. 115

way we could begin the realization of the old plan. But I am afraid to be Wrong ... I ask you to pray the Blessed Virgin to obtain light for me."<sup>44</sup>

"Pray to the Lord that he will smoothen the way, if such is his holy Will, so that I may truly follow that inclination, regarding the sick, which I do not as yet dare to call vocation."<sup>45</sup>

When some Religious called *Recluses of the Christian Retreat*, ("*Solitarie del Cristiano Ritiro*") whose main aim is the education and instruction of poor girls, happen to pass through Verona, Magdalene is tempted to collaborate with them:

"Some Religious", she writes to Carolina, "have passed through here and returned; they are called Recluses of the Christian Retreat..."

*Their first aim is the education of the poor girls, who are gathered by them, but most of all instruction through free schools, which I would like to have.*"<sup>46</sup>

After a few days she writes:

"After their departure, I had been given a book to read .... (I found) in substance more or less what is contained in the Plans you have .... I mean that it expresses ideas similar to mine in regard to education and work, but not about the sick as you know..."<sup>47</sup>

Carolina and Fr. De Vecchi do not share Magdalene's idea of joining her work together to that of those religious.

"Among the things of which I spoke about with Fr. De Vecchi during the meeting I had the pleasure to have .... we spoke also of the Recluses of the Christian Retreat and he too is of your opinion, namely that, for the time being, we must not entrust the youth to them, as long as we do not know them well..."<sup>48</sup>

While the number of the intern girls increases, the suggestion to open charity schools on the part of Bishop **Avogadro** is renewed. Magdalene has bought a new house in St. Zeno in Oratorio district and in July 1803 has begun the activity with four girls. She writes to Carolina thus:

"On Saturday, I have begun in the House of the girls the School for extern pupils. Pray for me, that it will be alright."<sup>49</sup>

One week later she repeats:

"I finally opened the school for extern pupils, where, however, I have only four little girls, as it is only one week since its opening."<sup>50</sup>

A constant succession of projects and tempting offers, stable only in appearance, produces fear and wonder in Magdalene.

She confides in her friend:

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<sup>44</sup> M d C., alla Durini, 4 aprile, 1802, Ep. I, p. 124.

<sup>45</sup> M d C., alla Durini, 18 aprile. 1802. Ep. I, p. 125.

<sup>46</sup> M.d.C., alla Dunni, 26 dicembre, 1802, Ep. 1, pp. 165-166. '

<sup>47</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 9 gennaio, 1803, Ep. I, p. 169

<sup>48</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 6 febbraio, 1803, Ep. I, p. 174.

<sup>49</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 3 luglio, 1803, Ep. 1, p. 193.

<sup>50</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 10 luglio, 1803, Ep. 1, p. 195.



".. You see my situation, I need recollection and time for myself and for the Work that the Lord seems to ask of me. Due to my weakness, I am afraid that because of this wedding<sup>51</sup>, I will have instead to come closer, more as less, to the world. I am still tied up with my patient<sup>52</sup> and Carlino. Till the Lord does not free me from these two obligations I cannot do anything. Now, since I feel very much the weight of so many ties and see my weakness in virtue, recommend myself to the prayers of my dearest friend so that the Lord will enlighten, dispose, facilitate all that he asks of me now and in the future. I open my heart to you, dearest Carolina. Therefore, pray for me as you already do and may others pray for your Magdalene."<sup>53</sup>

In 1804 Magdalene is being freed from family ties. Her brother Bonifacio is married; Uncle Borgia is dead and Uncle Gerolamo has decided to employ a teacher in his house for "his Carlino". Her Milanese friends wish to have her with them in Milan, but she tells them that she wants to ask the opinion of Fr. Felice De Vecchi. She therefore also invites Carolina to speak with him:

*"If the Lord does not about anything to the Contrary I shall he five ... The important thing is to truly know God's Will and what the greatest good can be done. Listen, my beloved Caroline, meanwhile let us pray much, but not too much, and let us make others pray ... Fr. De Vecchi had written to say that he will come to Verona in autumn if it is not difficult for you, tell him all the ideas you have spoken to him at length about mine when he came here. I also asked him to get information from the Luigine<sup>54</sup> and I know he already has done it. If you like we shall compare all the ways and if the Lord wills, as I hope, in his love he will let me know his holy will. I, for myself, am indifferent to everything. I mean, I hope to be thus, With God's help. because in all truth, I could never extinguish within me the desire to follow the spirit of the Daughters of Charity,<sup>55</sup> or something similar".<sup>56</sup>*

To Fr. De Vecchi, the direct collaboration of Magdalene with her friends in Milan does not seem positive, so he invites her to follow her vocation in Verona. Magdalene writes to her friend thus:

*"Let us speak now of Fr. De Vecchi, my dear Carolina .... He told me about your project and that of dear Teresa Arconati,<sup>57</sup> but, my dear friend, he would approve it only on condition that I cannot realize my plan in Verona. Therefore there is nothing else but to continue to pray."<sup>58</sup>*

And again:

*"My dear Carolina, perhaps you have already seen Fr. De Vecchi, and by now heard of his decision, that is, that I follow my vocation, remaining in Verona. I ask you to keep the matter confidential".<sup>59</sup>*

Magdalene describes this meeting with Fr. De Vecchi thus in her Memoirs:

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<sup>51</sup> It is the wedding of her brother Bonifacio with Countess Francesca Castiglioni. For biographical information cf. M. d. C. Ep. I, pp. 552 and 584.

<sup>52</sup> Her uncle Borgia. For biographical information cf. M.d.C., p 9

<sup>53</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 1 gennaio, 1804, Ep. 1, pp. 212-213.

<sup>54</sup> The Institute called "Conservatorio delle Luigine" of Parma had begun in 1755. Its specific aim was that of preparing poor girls to be the teachers of the poor girls of the city that is to form teachers for people of the lower class. (cf. M.d.C. Ep. 1. p. 167).

Magdalene who had visited the Luigine of Parma many times wished to make them known to her Milanese friends and also to Fr. De Vecchi.

<sup>55</sup> Founded by St. Vincent de Paul who was born in Pouilly Guascogna in 1585 and died in Paris in 1660

<sup>56</sup> M.d.C. alla Durini 12 giugno 1804 Ep.1 p.228.

<sup>57</sup> **Teresa Trotti** Arcollati sister of Caroline Durini and wife of Count Carlo Arconati. For further information cf. M.d.C. Ep. 1 p. 8 note 9.

<sup>58</sup> M.d.C. alla Durini 14 gennaio 1805. Ep. 1 pp. 245-246.

<sup>59</sup> M d C.. alla Durini 2 giugno 1805. Ep. 1. p. 253

*"When it pleased the Lord to loosen her bonds, then her earlier desires re-emerged. As the project she had in mind was truly grand, and being aware that she had never really sensed the Lord, it seemed to her that all was just madness. Since a Barnabite priest, noted for his piety and learning, came to her city and stayed in her house, she told him something of her plans and asked him if he would be willing to give her as a companion a lady who was under his direction. The person was a professed member of the Institute of the Ladies of Faith a branch of the Sisters of Charity<sup>60</sup> founded by St. Vincent de Paul".<sup>61</sup>*

This is what Magdalene told Fr. De Vecchi and some conclusions emerge from the letter she writes to her cousin, Countess Maria Teresa Cavriani<sup>62</sup> on Feb. 18, 1805:

*"It has been many years since the Lord ... called me to serve him in the poor through works of charity but the obligations I had towards my family allowed me to follow my vocation only in a small way. Seeing on the one hand that evil is increasing day by day and the need I have to begin to work for my sanctification and on the other hand because of my limitation and lack of experience I had been looking for.... an institution in which it would be possible to live a spirit of union with God and detachment from everything carrying out at the same time all the works of charity and for a companion who had the sanctity vocation and experience to be my guide and helper. For a long time I did not find neither one nor the other. Only six or eight months ago the Lord through Fr. De Vecchi brought to my knowledge both the Institution and the companion .... The Institution is: the first founded by St. Vincent de Paul which after the Saint's death for human motives was divided in France into two Institutes one known by the title of Sisters of Charity and the other lately called Ladies of the Propagation of Faith.*

*Besides the interior exercise of all the virtues with special attention to silence and prayer this Institute in its essence embraces the following works. First of all assistance to the girls so that they may not be caught by the current evil .... and secondly, with the necessary prudence several times during the year adult women are admitted into the house for Spiritual Exercises ... Finally this institution embraces the last act of charity that is assistance to the sick both in hospitals and in their homes...*

*You can very well see what this requires and I myself in spite of my great desires would be frightened if I did not have the assurance from the person who directs me that God wants this work and he wants it through my help. But...besides it seems that since I cannot do without her God wants her differently from my plan to be the foundress; here's how it is. The companion whom God gave me ... is a lady of German origin who had to abandon due to political circumstances the suppressed convent of her Institute, and has been helped, I believe, for about ten years by Fr. De Vecchi .... The same Father does not allow her to join me if I do not have a fund which guarantees an annual maintenance in the case of my death, or if the Work does not continue .... I would like to know if in case I die, you would take the responsibility to provide what will still be lacking for this agreement."<sup>63</sup>*

Magdalene in her Memoirs speaks about the meeting with this "companion" without saying when it happened; it is nonetheless certain that this "Lady of Faith" is the same person described by her in the letter

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<sup>60</sup> "During its first years, the Institute of the Daughters of Charity, founded by St. Vincent de Paul, was somewhat divided into three branches: the first by the name Ladies of Charity, comprising members from the higher nobility. These Ladies, moved by the spirit of piety dedicated themselves to the service of the poor and the sick, visiting hospitals and prisons. They were found all over where misfortune and misery required their help The second branch was the Sisters of Charity. This was how all the charitable Christian women who gathered in communities, forming a Congregation, were then called. They took vows for only a brief period and spread to different parts of the kingdom according to the needs. Finally the third branch was the Daughters of Charity, who were totally dependent on the Ladies and the Sisters of Charity and which in the beginning were as we said, from the lower class of society. Later on, a reorganization took place the second and the third branches joined into one and were called either Daughters or Sisters of Charity .... St. Vincent wanted the noble Virgins be called precisely Daughters of Charity and not Sisters because this title, according to him was more in keeping with the religious spirit, indicating them as Daughters of the heavenly Father and the God of Charity." (cf. Lit Solelle *della Calita* ... Italian translation by G.R., Milan 1840, pp. 14-16)

<sup>61</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. Ia, p. 321.

<sup>62</sup> For bibliographic information about Countess cf. M.d.C., Ep. 1, p. 587.

<sup>63</sup> M.d.C., alla Contessa Maria Teresa Cavriani, 18 febbraio, 1805. Ep. I pp. 589-591.

addressed to Countess Maria Teresa Cavriani in which, as we just saw, she also summarizes the works of the Institution of St. Vincent.

In the Memoirs we read thus:

*"With great sacrifice she was granted one who had already been professed in the Institute of the "Ladies of Faith", a branch of the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul and she could also exchange ideas with the same. she got from her the description of the original Institute of the Sisters of Charity and remained interiorly fully satisfied, seeing that she had found what she had been looking for, for a long time..."<sup>64</sup>*

### A support for the Work

Between the two encounters, that with Fr. De Vecchi and the other with the "companion", Magdalene emphasizes the important one with Msgr. Pacetti,<sup>65</sup> which will mark the decisive turn in her life and in the Foundation of the Institute. The date of this meeting is not given, but it can be presumed that it occurred before 1805 since Magdalene wrote the Memoirs on Pacetti's order, ten years after those events happened. In the letter to Msgr. Pacetti dated Aug. 19, 1805, Magdalene describes, in fact, all the events beginning from the end of 1804.

In the Memoirs we find recorded this first encounter:

*"Finally, since a priest<sup>66</sup> of outstanding position, zeal and experience happened to come to Verona and to visit her family, she manifested clearly all her ideas to him when he suggested to her to get involved in Charitable works he was planning.*

*This holy priest encouraged her to undertake the work she had at heart and did not even speak about the first; therefore she began thinking more seriously about it. This person is still surprised that she confided in one who was not her Director, Nor she was then, as now, most reluctant to seek counsel from anyone, except from her Director."<sup>67</sup>*

At first Canon Pacetti wished to involve Magdalene in a project that he himself was contemplating, but she, probably won over by the attitude of this priest whom she defines "of outstanding position, piety and great experience", confides in him and clearly reveals the aspirations which she nurtured for so long in her heart.

Msgr. Pacetti then "withdraws his proposal and gives himself to the project Magdalene confides to him".<sup>68</sup> Meanwhile some events occur which throw light and shadow on the future of Magdalene of Canossa. On May 26, 1805 the Emperor Napoleon I came to Italy to be crowned King of Italy in the Lombard capital. In June, while Napoleon, passing through Verona, is a guest at the Canossa Palace, Magdalene asks and obtains from her relatives permission to stay in the house of the girls at St. Zeno. She thought this to be the right time to reveal her project and detach herself completely from the family.

But once more the ways of the Lord are not those of Magdalene. She herself confides to Durini and Msgr. Pacetti what happened.

She writes to her Milanese friend thus:

*"... while the Emperor was in Verona as a guest in our house, I went to live with the girls and remained there for eight days. I took that occasion, my dear, to make known my vocation to my family. As you may imagine, my desire, which I mention to you many times, is to go and stay with the girls. Once we are together, I want to organise community life for myself and the companions, whom the Lord will he*

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<sup>64</sup> M d.C.. R.s.s.. P. Ia. p. 822.

<sup>65</sup> Msgr Luigi Pacetti (1761-1819), ex-Jesuit, "apostolic missionary", and direct collaborator of Pius VII, was also Magdalene's closest collaborator in the visualizing, structuring and organization of the Institute. He had been **the first Superior** of the Institute. It was he who asked the Foundress to write the Rules, which he himself presented to Pope Pius VII for approval.

<sup>66</sup> Canon Msgr. Pacetti

<sup>67</sup> M.d.C Rss., P. 1, pp 321-t22

<sup>68</sup> cf. T. Piccari, op. cit. p. 336

*pleased to call, and to dedicate ourselves in works of charity. You can imagine .... the opposition made by my family. However, thanks to God, after long talks and disagreements, they agreed to let me go and stay with my girls once I have found a more suitable place to establish the work for them.*<sup>69</sup>

On August 19, 1805, in order to be helped to understand the will of God better and put it into practice, Magdalene writes to Msgr. Pacetti describing in detail what happened during that time. Some of these details appear also in the letter written to her cousin Maria Teresa Cavriani as quoted earlier:

*"... since last winter, when Fr. De Vecchi came to Verona, between the same Father, the Archpriest,<sup>70</sup> who is my director, and myself, it has been agreed that Fr. De Vecchi, upon his return from the Missions and Lenten preaching, will inform my family about my vocation and we would then take the necessary steps to carry it out. He agreed to give me the companion you know, on condition that I provide for her maintenance, in the case of my death, or if the Lord would not be pleased to establish the contemplated works .... it has been planned that I and my companion would go to live in the house with the little girls I gathered whom you know, and there receive one or more Companions who have the same vocation, with no other wish than to work for the education of these girls. Besides the girls who live in the house, we have also the school for the poor girls who are left on their own in the street. After school, they return to their home. I am continuously asked to accept many others because of the great spiritual needs, but I am forced to refuse them for lack of space or teachers. Everything would be taken care of, if we had a larger school. Then I would organize our community life, with the distribution of hours, method of prayer, silence, recollection and the exercise of virtues which is asked by the Rules of St. Vincent de Paul<sup>71</sup>. We would wear our lay dresses and dedicate ourselves to the care of the girls, both intern and extern. We would not begin, not even in private, the various branches that you know the Institute is to embrace, as long as the one we have in hand is not well established, and we would continue afterwards in the same way. Having agreed on this, I began to procure ways for the maintenance of my companion ... God blessed my steps, and this was concluded according to the desire of Fr. de Vecchi."<sup>72</sup>*

The concerted plan is not carried out because of a "momentary rigidity" of the director, Don Nicola Galvani. Meanwhile Magdalene suffers and prays. Then she continues her report to Msgr. Pacetti:

*"The said Father<sup>73</sup> was supposed to return soon after Easter. But one day, towards the end of Lent, the Archpriest<sup>74</sup> told me that he could see that I do not trust the Lord as much as I should, which is unfortunately true, and that I rely too much on human help saying that for the time should not think about realizing my vocation. I confess that I remained very troubled, but most of all, oppressed."<sup>75</sup>*

When everything is calm again, Magdalene takes advantage of the arrival of the Emperor to communicate to her family her decision, using the confessors of Uncle Gerolamo and her brother Bonifacio as intermediaries. The family, surprised and disconcerted, does not agree to Magdalene's request, and demands

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<sup>69</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 26 giugno, 1805, Ep. 1, p. 255.

<sup>70</sup> Don Nicola Galvani (1752-1823), Archpriest of St. John in Foro in Verona, had been the spiritual director of Magdalene after the death of Don Luigi Libera (Jan. 22, 1800)

<sup>71</sup> In the Canossian Archives in Rome, among the Foundress' documentations, there is a translation of the Rules of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent De Paul attributed to Don Galvani. Fr. Piccari notes: "It is not without emotion that one reads the note-book (76 pages on lined paper) (R.D.G NV.) written by Don Galvani who finished translating from French, word by word, "the Rules of the Daughters of Charity, servants of the poor and sick". (cf. T. Piccari, op. cit. p. 1)2 note 12).

<sup>72</sup> M.d.C., a Mons. Pacetti, 19 agosto, 1815, Ep. II/1, pp. 7-9

<sup>73</sup> Fr. Felice De Vecchi.

<sup>74</sup> Don Nicola Galvani

<sup>75</sup> M.d.C., a Mons. Pacetti, 19 agosto, 1815, Ep. II/1, pp. 9

her immediate return. No permission would be granted till a more suitable place was found, more in keeping with the dignity of her rank and family decorum. Magdalene returns. The fear not to do God's will makes her suffer for various reasons: a life divided between the Palace and the Home of the girls, her affection for the members of her family being put to a hard test.

What was God's will? Some circumstances were making the situation more complex. The companions who had come were in suspense. Msgr. Galvani, her spiritual director, after her first attempt to leave the family failed, accused her of doing things in haste and did not support her in the new steps towards the realization of the Work. For the time being, Magdalene is incapable of making a decision. She thus expresses herself:

*"What stopped me.... has been a disposition of the Lord, a punishment, I believe, for the many times I wronged him, and also a cross he wanted to give to me, because I do not put all my trust in him alone. The Archpriest who had given me his consent for all that I did ... on his return home told me that I acted hastily. For the time being he doesn't want me to do anything about the contract for the house or to take any decision. He wants me only to pray and wait to know the means and time from God alone. I cannot express how much burdened I have been by this new command. I have been obeying for two months, but very imperfectly, because I believe that almost up to now, I have always displeased the Lord rather than getting Him involved.*

*However, in whatever way I act, what causes me great pain is the fear of not doing the will of God. In obeying the Archpriest **and keeping** the matter in suspense, I am afraid of not preventing many sins which instead could be done if the Work begins even on a private basis... On the other hand, from time to time, my fears return when thinking of leaving my family ... most of all I have at heart the little boy ... I tell you all my fears, Monsignor, and I put myself in your hands."<sup>76</sup>*

This letter is also a clear proof of a twofold direction: Don Nicola Galvani remains her spiritual director, but Msgr. Pacetti, from now on, becomes the director for her Work. This is affirmed by Magdalene herself:

*"... (I write) to inform you about the state of my affairs and also to have your advice, which I want to follow, since it is also the desire of the very Reverend Archpriest (Galvani)..."<sup>77</sup>*

The Lord purifies and prepares her through the cross for the coming realization of her vocation. In her Memoirs, Magdalene speaks about this painful time too, adding however, that the Lord consoles her in prayer, making her understand that the Lord deserves everything.

*"On this occasion she had to suffer much, and it seemed even more than her health could bear, had not God sustained her through prayer in this great affliction. In it, He not only made her perceive that He deserved all, but He also consoled her with a special concern and tender love. So even though she felt totally isolated she remained strong in her decision".<sup>78</sup>*

Another attempt to start the Institution took place in the meantime, but this too failed. In the Memoirs we read:

*"In the meantime, God allowed a person to be recommended to her. She seemed to have all the necessary requirements for collaborating, but when it came to the organization of their way of living, her opinion clashed with those of the other person, complicating the situation more and more, so much so that the first companion turned to another solution. This person, on her part, was advised to let go also the second companion and so she found herself alone again."<sup>79</sup>*

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<sup>76</sup> M d C.. a Mons. Pacetti, 19 agosto. 1805, Ep. II/1. pp. 10-12.

<sup>77</sup> M.d.C., a Mons. Pacetti, 19 agosto, 1805, Ep. II/1, p.7

<sup>78</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. Ia p. 322.

<sup>79</sup> ibid. pp. 322-323.

Alone once again, Magdalene intensifies her prayer, and at the same time asks the help of influential persons for the acquisition of the Monastery of Sts. Joseph and Fidenzio, suppressed and acquired by the government. Msgr. Pacetti, justly considered as the director of the Institute from its beginning, sustains and encourages her both to pray as well as to carry out the transactions for the purchase of the Monastery.

Thus he writes to her from Venice on Sept. 5, 1806:

*"On Fridays, give to your prayer two hours more than usual, and use the rest for the good of the Work. Be at peace, once for all, about your fears of doing wrong. God does not change. Your Work is surely His. Therefore, why should you worry? In regard to the purchase of the Monastery, be assured that you are doing the best one could desire."<sup>80</sup>*

The transactions for the purchase of the Monastery of Sts. Joseph and Fidenzio, because of the political situation, lasted from 1806 till 1808.

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<sup>80</sup> Mons. Pacetti, a Maddalena, 5 settembre, 1806, ms., A2, XXXI, ACR.

## Chapter III

### TOWARDS A RULE

Although free from family ties, Magdalene could not go and live with her girls because, according to her relatives, the environment was not dignified enough. It was the year 1805, and it would take another two years before she could enter the Monastery of Sts. Joseph and Fidenzio.

In the Memoirs, she confirms thus:

*"Having overcome many contradictions, she obtained a suitable place, after nearly two years. Through her Director, she found a Companion<sup>1</sup> full of good qualities and with some others she moved there having also obtained the consent of her family. That Religious (Canon Pacetti) who got this companion for her was not that Director mentioned up to now (Don Galvani) but a priest from another town to whom her Director had commanded her to obey and from whom she had permission to seek advice. J-eely .... She entered most willingly because she was convinced of the true discernment of that priest and because of her desire to separate herself from the world and to start her Work."<sup>2</sup>*

Magdalene and Leopoldina Naudet with their respective companions and the girls, already gathered in the house of S. Zeno in Oratorio, enter St. Joseph on May 7, 1808. The date of the beginning is confirmed in Magdalene's letter to her friend Carolina on May 19, 1808:

*"I have already passed 12 days in the new premises and the first Mass was celebrated on the feast of St. Joseph<sup>3</sup> the Patron after whom the Convent is named. Believe me there is more than enough to do in this house and being in the centre of the district there is a great concourse of people. Pray that the Lord may bless our small efforts and with his grace make them bear it."<sup>4</sup>*

1808 marks the beginning of the Institute. Magdalene herself, after several years, confirms it:

*"It has pleased the Divine Gloty since 1805 to begin this least Institute in Verona even if the weakest instrument whom he wanted to make use of for the purpose could not understand the divine plan fully. Initiated privately it expanded itself little by little following the steps of Divine Providence."<sup>5</sup>*

T. Piccari, a scholar with a deep knowledge of Magdalene, makes this comment:

*"As soon as the ex-monastery of Sts. Joseph and Fidenzio became the property of the Institute it appeared in the eyes of the clergy as providential presage of a revival of Christian life. But to meet the needs of the people vocations were required. Because of the revolutionary laws it was not difficult to*

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<sup>1</sup> The companion is Leopoldina Naudet (1773-1834). She was born at Florence. Her father was a French man, whose family had come from Lorraine to that city at the service of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Pietro Leopoldo. She lost her mother at the age of five, and her father when she was fourteen. She had been called to the Court, first in Florence, then in Vienna, by Leopoldo who had become the Emperor. She had been lady-in-waiting to the Archdukes, and then together with the Archduchess, Mary Anne, and her sister Luisa, she first animated, and from 1801 directed as Superior, the incipient Institute of the "Beloved of Jesus", (Dilette di Gesu') of Ignatian spirit. However, her work failed soon after. Following the advice of Canon Pacetti, whom she met in Italy in 1807, she joined Magdalene of Canossa at the beginning of 1808. And together with her, Magdalene not only received her companions "Maria Buseti, Sofia Gagnere with her sister Adelaide, Anna Sacchetto, Chiara Canton..." (cf. Nello Dalle Vedove, *Dalla Clona al Chizvstz o Tip. Stigmatini*, Verona, 1954, pp. 307-308), but showed her great trust by putting her in charge, as Superior, of the Retreat of St. Joseph. In 1816 with her companions, she left to start the new Institution of the Holy Family.

<sup>2</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P.Ia, p. 324.

<sup>3</sup> In that year (X)X, the feast of the patronage of St. Joseph fell on Sunday May X.

<sup>4</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 19 maggio, 1808, Ep. 1, p. 309.

<sup>5</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. I a, p. 303.

*recruit them from the suppressed Institutes provided they were animated by zeal for the well-being of their neighbor Now the group of Naudet could be inserted in the plans even if only provisional of the Canossa Retreat for the good of a "modern" religious way of life dedicated to the education of youth.*<sup>6</sup>

Magdalene had already projected in 1805, if the attempt were successful, to withdraw with her girls and her teachers, to establish

*"... an internal system" she writes to Carolina  
"for me and for those companions whom the Lord would be pleased to call and to engage in external works of charity."*<sup>7</sup>

At that time, the project had failed. Now instead, beginning finally the much longed-for Institution, it became necessary to organize the life of the community and the apostolate. The same Msgr. Pacetti commands Magdalene to write the Rules:

*"She had received an order from the one who was directing her to write the Rules of the new Institute: she was more than convinced that the other (companion)<sup>8</sup> was more enlightened than herself regarding internal organization and she adapted herself for the main part to her way of thinking remaining firm however in many essential things. She wrote a small set of Rules on the basis of the said plan".*<sup>9</sup>

### **First attempt at regulations**

Being at its beginning and still under experiment the "Plan" spoken of, regarding only the female branch, cannot but be, even if undated, that which is named "PLAN OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF CHARITY FOR THE CITY N.N."<sup>10</sup> it is a "Plan" which must serve as a basis for other foundations. In it one reads:

*"Many pious persons being aware of the ignorance of the common people ... wish to form a Congregation of Charity."*<sup>11</sup>

To confirm that Magdalene's inspirations are common to many other persons, it is enough to recall here all those of whom we have spoken before, like Don Pietro Leonardi, Fr. Domenico Bellavite, Fr. Felice De Vecchi, Canon Pacetti and others.<sup>12</sup>

In this "Plan", Magdalene defines, with greater precision, the form of life she proposes: no longer "pious union or draft"<sup>13</sup> but "Congregation of Charity", where she mentions the "Rules", a "Superior" and the "celibate". These elements clearly reveal a more concrete vision of life than in the preceding document.

We read:

*"... the said pious persons ... propose to live together in the same House under the direction of a superior chosen from among them and to observe celibacy in order to give themselves wholly to serve their neighbours."*<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Piccari, op. cit., pp. 233-234.

<sup>7</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 26 giugno, 1805, Ep. 1, p. 255.

<sup>8</sup> It is Leopoldina Naudet.

<sup>9</sup> M.d.C., R.S.s., P. Ia, p. 324.

<sup>10</sup> M.d.C., Piano B. 7-7, Ep. 11/2, pp. 1420-1421. In A.C.R., the copy of the Plan B. 6-6, notarized by the Curia of Verona, is incorporated in the document B. 7-7. There is the seal and name but no date: Concordat cum originali, U. Albagini Not. gem Deputatus.

<sup>11</sup> M.d.C., Piano B. 7-7, Ep. 11/2, p. 1420.

<sup>12</sup> cf. Chapter 1, note 17. Chapter 11, note 25, 40, 65.

<sup>13</sup> Magdalene refers to Piano B. 6-6, Ep. 11/2, p. 1416

<sup>14</sup> M.d.C., Piano B. 7-7, Ep. 11/2, p. 1420.



All the components of a religious community are present here. Only in 1808, Magdalene, free from family commitments, can live a common life of a religious character with her companions in the monastery of St. Joseph, and only then can she give to herself and her community a rule of life. Much later, writing a "Memo for Count Mellerio", Magdalene recalls that the choice of the first House in the district of S. Zeno had been also due

*"... to the requests of the Parish priest so that we could offer ourselves to teach Catechism in in the Parish, where there were two classes for women..."<sup>15</sup>*

And in the "Plan" she had written:

*"... there are hut some poor women who, in order to earn a livelihood, act as teachers, who teach their pupils only the Rosary and the first notions of Christian Doctrine. They make the girls learn these by heart, without explaining their meaning which they themselves do not know."<sup>16</sup>*

And when, after the foundation of the House in Venice, the aim of the Institute becomes clearer to her, she abandons the idea of some activities present in the above-mentioned Plan, such as, assistance to the sick in the homes. the orphanages and the boarding homes.

*"... the Sisters who come together, will assist the sick, both in the home and in the hospital... If the ecclesial government were to desire that they take up the running of the hospitals for the sick and the orphans, the Superiors of the Congregation will send Sisters who will be able to serve, both in number and capacity..."<sup>17</sup>*

Writing afterwards to Carolina about the activity of the house in Venice, she says instead:

*"Be aware that these Sisters do not go to help the sick in the homes..."<sup>18</sup>*

And again in the "Memo to Count Mellerio", she writes:

*"I was called, some years after, to Venice, and having decided to establish there .... the above proposed Institute, I did not want absolutely to include any residential home for girls .... After this happy change, I thought about making also the House in Verona similar to that of Venice, and, keeping all the girls that we had, I ceased to receive any more interns."<sup>19</sup>*

Having initiated the educational activities, it was urgent to work to recruit and form apostles. Regarding this plan she writes:

*"... and I saw, in like manner, how, in order to do real good to the population, it was becoming necessary to receive Daughters desiring to serve God and neighbour, to form them well in piety, so that they would not yield to the burdens laden on our human nature by such work, keeping a certain system of prudence and of wisdom, as these women are not under a rule and many of them are young. I saw therefore, a very good model, in all respects, in the Institute of the great Servant of God, St. Vincent de Paul, established many years ago in France, under the title of Daughters of Charity, the only Institute of women which remained unharmed even through the storms of the Revolution. This, anyhow, needs to be adapted to the customs of Italy and adjusted to the ways required by the differences of the country and as the moral corruption demands."<sup>20</sup>*

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<sup>15</sup> M.d.C Pro memory al Conte Mellerio. 25 marzo, 1818, Ep. II/1, p. 103.

<sup>16</sup> M.d.C., Piano B. 7-7, Ep. 11/2, p. 1420.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid*, p. 1421

<sup>18</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 9 agosto, 1812, Ep. 1, pp. 367-368.

<sup>19</sup> M.d.C., Pro-memoria al Conte Mellerio, 25 marzo, 1818, Ep. 11/1, p. 105. <sup>17</sup> *ibid*.p. 105.

<sup>20</sup>

This need to draw up the Rules and to follow St. Vincent de Paul as the model, from whom she drew inspiration, is clearly expressed in an article of the "Informative Process" of 1870:

*"The Servant of God, having succeeded in gathering a sufficient number of teachers and in forming them spiritually, thought that the time had come to erect her House as a Religious Institute. Having meanwhile examined hooks and Rules of communities of active life, she was almost determined to follow that of St. Vincent de Paul, not to be directly affiliated to it, but at least united with the Sisters of Charity regarding practices and observances. But, considering that the Saint embraced every kind of charitable work for the neighbor, she, with a great sense of discernment, took from the Rules of the Sisters of Charity only what was in keeping with the aim she had, so that her Institute would not be distracted by too many burdensome and varied tasks."*<sup>21</sup>

It is clear that she is speaking here of an inspiration a selection, a choice of what is in keeping with her aim, and not of a "direct affiliation".

This attraction of Magdalene for the Rule of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul is already present in the draft of the first "Plan" where it is said:

*"It is not intended in this draft to speak about either the methods nor the rules; only it is added that, if it pleases the Lord to establish this work, there is the intention to take them from different institutions, and especially .... from those of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, for women..."*<sup>22</sup>

Magdalene keeps this inspiration even after she examined other Rules, Regulations and Inns between 1801 and 1805. This is confirmed by the fact that, when she is at the point of taking a decision in 1804 with Fr. Felice De Vecchi, she writes to Carolina:

*"...to tell the truth, I could never extinguish my attraction towards the Daughters of Charity or something similar..."*<sup>23</sup>

She is of the same idea when in 1805, as we already said, she reveals to Msgr. Pacetti that she would like

*"... to organize our community life according to the time-table, the method of prayer, of silence and recollection and the exercise of interior virtues, as asked by the Rules of St. Vincent de Paul..."*<sup>24</sup>

The Vincentian inspiration is confirmed also by that passage of the Memoirs in which Magdalene describes her encounter with the companion with whom she should have started the work:

*"From this person, she had a wide description of the first Institute of the Sisters of Charity..."*<sup>25</sup>

The "First Institute" is that of the Sisters of Charity which in France combined the duties of community life with those of the apostolate at large.

The dream of Magdalene was to transfer to Italy a type of religious life open to the works of charity for the benefit of the poor. But even if an inspired discernment leads her to share the Vincentian lifestyle, it also makes her determined to give to her Institute a totally original character and spirit.

*"The description of this Plan, however, did not arouse in her that interior and total acceptance and attraction for the same, producing that inner peace, tranquility and joy, that, in the opinion of the person who writes, accompany the matters ... which the Lord inspires. It rather seems to her that it was a purely intellectual conviction. So she had no difficulty in omitting, for justified reasons, some of the things which*

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<sup>21</sup> Processo ordinario, Verona, 1870. Vol. 1, par. 42, p.

<sup>22</sup> M d C, Piano B. 6-6, Ep. 11/2, p 1416

<sup>23</sup> M d C, alla Dumni, 12 giugno, 1804, Ep. 1, p. 228

<sup>24</sup> M.d.C, a Mons Pacetti, 19 agosto, 1805, Ep 11/1, p. 8.

<sup>25</sup> M d.C., R.s.s., P. I a, p. 322.

were already set down in the Plan given to her, and replacing them with others having a similar meaning. And this with peace ..." <sup>26</sup>

The peace which accompanies such determination is for Magdalene a sign which reveals the will of God for her and her Work.

### Drafts of the Rule called "Reflections"

A very important document representing a decisive step towards the draft of the "Rules" is the autograph manuscript by Magdalene, entitled: "REFLECTIONS MADE BY ME ON THE RULES OF THE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY".

The document is not dated, but because of its content and the person it is addressed to, Msgr. Pacetti, it can be said with certainty that it has been written before 1812. In 1812, in fact, Magdalene begins the final draft of the "Rules", and in the same year Canon Pacetti leaves the Lombard-Venetian region to return to the Marches, his birthplace, for reasons of health.

On this occasion, Magdalene writes to her friend Carolina:

*"I also received your last letter and that of the Canon<sup>27</sup> which you enclosed. But know, my dear, that it is about a month now, since he returned home, because of his weak health and the strong solicitation from his family...."*<sup>28</sup>

It is confirmed by the correspondence between Magdalene and Pacetti that the Canon returned to the Lombard-Venetian region towards the end of 1815, where he met the Marchioness in February 1816.<sup>29</sup>

We would expect that Magdalene, having spoken so much about the Rules of St. Vincent, would have made her reflections on the text of the "Common Rules of the Daughters of Charity, Servants of the poor sick people", of which she had the French translation, attributed by Fr. Piccari to Don Nicola Galvani.<sup>30</sup>

The manuscript, instead, to which Magdalene refers, has the title: "RULES OF THE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY MDCCCI". Its chapters coincide perfectly with those given by her in the "Reflections".

Magdalene annotates what she considers valid, and what she would like to modify. Msgr. Pacetti in his own hand-writing, comments on every article with brief and meaningful expressions, giving his authoritative opinion.

"RULE OF THE SISTERS OF CHARITY"

"REFLECTIONS MADE BY ME..."

Chapter II  
on Mental Prayer

Part I  
Chapter II

"The amount of Meditation in our Congregation the whole day shall be hour in the morning and the

*Magdalene:* "Only one hour of Meditation for seems too little to me

same in the evening."<sup>31</sup>

*Msgr. Pacetti:* Forty five minutes in the morning and half an hour in the evening".<sup>32</sup>

"The method of mental Prayer

<sup>26</sup> M.d.C, Memone, ms., Q.A. p. 97, A3 11, A C R

<sup>27</sup> It is Canon Pacetti

<sup>28</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 9 agosto, 1812, Ep. 1, p. 367.

<sup>29</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 28 febbraio, 1816, Ep. 1, p. 442.

<sup>30</sup> cf. Chapter 11 note 70.

<sup>31</sup> Rules of the Sisters of Charity, MDCCCI, ms., p. 14, E, A.C.R.

<sup>32</sup> M d.c., R.s.s.. P. 2a. p 75 R.d.S.d.C., ms., pp. 23-25, E, A.C.R. (N3)

we have to keep in our Congregation, must be that found in the book of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius..."<sup>33</sup>

*Magdalene:* "As for the method to be used to teach the novices how to do it, I like to follow that of St. Ignatius as a general rule, but then, I like each one to do it her way, and as the Spirit of the Lord moves her.  
*Msgr. Pacetti:* it is alright, but it needs to be clarified."<sup>34</sup>

#### Chapter IV On Silence

#### Chapter IV On Silence

"Silence is to be observed every day from the vocal prayer of the evening till after Mass..."<sup>35</sup>

*Magdalene:* "I would like to have silence as it is prescribed, for the whole day, excluding the two hours of recreation.  
*Msgr. Pacetti:* Silence will be necessary, but the time should be fixed in relation to the tasks..."<sup>36</sup>

#### Chapter VIII On the reception of the holy sacraments

#### Chapter VIII On the reception of the holy sacraments

St. Francis of Sales...suggests to devout souls who want to reach perfection, to go to confession every eight days. It is desired that all the Sisters of Charity follow the advice of this Saint... permission from the Director to that the Sisters be fervent enough the method for those who wish twice a week, or even more often, if the Confessor allows it".<sup>37</sup>

*Msgr. Pacetti.* On the point of confessors, it is better to explain further.  
*Magdalene:* I would lay down that all the Sisters go to confession every eight days.  
*Msgr. Pacetti:* and with As for Holy Communion it is desired receive communion. For this, to deserve to receive communion and may receive communion many times a week has to be established."<sup>38</sup>

#### Chapter XI On the practice of Holy Poverty

#### Chapter XI On the practice of Holy Poverty

"...The Sisters of Charity are interior feeling of the one who they are to be poor not only in spirit writes .... seems to be that this but also in

<sup>33</sup> R.d.S.d.C., ms., p. 14, E, A.C.R.

<sup>34</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. 2a, p. 75

<sup>35</sup> R.d.S.d.C., ms., pp. 17-18, E, A.C.R.

<sup>36</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. 2a, p. 75

<sup>37</sup> R.d.S.d.C., ms., pp. 23-25, E, A.C.R.

<sup>38</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. 2a, p. 75.

reality...  
nothing, and live  
at all..."<sup>39</sup>

Congregation should possess The sisters cannot possess anything  
totally abandoned to Divine  
Providence..."<sup>40</sup>

absolutely

#### Chapter XIV

On the young women and other  
persons who can be accepted into  
the Congregation

"When young women present  
themselves and ask to join the  
congregation, they are not to be  
received right away into the  
House ... for greater clarity,  
we shall state here those who  
cannot be accepted...  
7 - those who have lived,  
a dissolute life, even though  
they have repented...  
After the Prioress and the  
Senior Sisters have accepted  
a person on probation, she will  
come every day for six months  
to the House of the  
Congregation..."<sup>41</sup>

#### Chapter XVI

On union and fraternal Charity

"...If a Sister has grieved another  
even on the first impulse, and  
it is a small fault, she will humble  
herself and regret it immediately,  
not only interiorly in the heart,  
but also exteriorly asking pardon;  
the one who has been offended  
shall immediately pardon, with-  
virtue is not very deep,  
complaining to others..."<sup>43</sup>

#### Chapter XIV

On the young women  
who can be accepted etc.

*Msgr. Pacetti:* "Repentant sinners  
are not to be accepted.  
*Magdalene:* "I am of the opinion  
absolutely not to accept a person  
who, even for a short time, lived a  
scandalous life, if the scandal has  
been public, even though she  
appears to have repented. And for  
all the other cases, I agree with  
the Rule. During the first months  
of probation it does not seem  
convenient to me, being wome,  
that they go back and forth every  
morning and evening.  
*Msgr. Pacetti:* It is right that they  
do not go back and forth..."<sup>42</sup>

#### Chapter XVI

On union and fraternal Charity

*Msgr. Pacetti:* "It is very good.  
*Magdalene:* "As for reconciling  
with one another, asking pardon  
when they have been offending  
each other, I like the norm very  
much. It could be desirable that  
our virtue were such that we  
could be reconciled immediately.  
it seems to me that asking pardon  
right away could give the Sisters  
the occasion to offend each other  
and to grow colder. I would say

But if

<sup>39</sup> R.d.S.d.C., ms., pp. 30-31, E, A.C.R

<sup>40</sup> M.d.C.. R.s.s., P. 2a, p. 76.

<sup>41</sup> R.d.S.d.C., ms., pp. 35-36, E, A.C.R

<sup>42</sup> M.d.C.. R.s.s., P. 2a, p. 77.

<sup>43</sup> R.d.S.d.C.. ms, p. 43, E, A.C.R.

that they should reconcile as soon  
as possible, and as a rule, they  
have to do it within the same day".<sup>44</sup>

After the detailed analysis of the "Reflections", of the comments of Msgr. Pacetti and of the corresponding passages of the "Rules of the Sisters of Charity", it seems possible to affirm that both Magdalene and Pacetti had the entire Rule of the Sisters of Charity close at hand while they were writing.

Some passages, already quoted, confirm this; Magdalene writes in the "Reflections":

*"...I too agree with the Rule...  
...I like the norm very much..."*<sup>45</sup>

Msgr. Pacetti annotates:

*"It is good, but it needs to be clarified.  
...For Chapter V, annotations need to be done."*<sup>46</sup>

What has been said confirms that these "Reflections" have been made at a date preceding the departure, on July 1812, of Msgr. Pacetti.

There remains an open question, without the possibility of a definite answer: "Who wrote this Rule of the Sisters of Charity?" The manuscript text is anonymous; it does not give any references as to who the founder could be and it gives only the date as 1801.

The anonymous author, in the introduction, speaks of his intention of instituting a Congregation following the model of St. Vincent de Paul. Therefore, it is not the case of an already existing institution.

The aim presented by him to the Sisters of Charity, whom he intended to institute, was, besides personal sanctification, the gathering and instruction of poor girls and the visits to sick women in hospitals and in their homes.

The manuscript, consisting of 89 pages, though rich in biblical and patristic quotations, when read in its entirety reveals a lack of a unifying principle and a unitary inspiration.

If we compare the Unabridged Rule<sup>47</sup> of the Daughters of Charity to this anonymous rule, we find a substantial difference in spite of the common traits previously cited.

The former is centred on the Spirit of Jesus Crucified, the Exemplar from whom the vows, the virtues, all religious practices, the formation of the novices and also the various works of Charity draw life. Instead, the anonymous "Rule" of the Sisters of Charity is made up of ideas and norms common to other Rules, and above all, it lacks that unity which characterizes the Rule of the Daughters of Charity and distinguishes it from other Rules. We cannot identify with certainty the person who wrote it, but some hypotheses are possible. Magdalene of Canossa, from 1801 to 1808 prepared herself by reading and studying the Rules of other religious Congregations. This is confirmed by the exchange of books, Regulations and Rules, particularly, between herself and Countess Carolina Durini.

One probability could be some persons under the direction of Fr. De Vecchi.

Valdani,<sup>48</sup> in the biography of Fr. De Vecchi, writes:

*"... for many years he had at heart the foundation of a Congregation of the Daughters of Charity similar to that erected in France by St. Vincent de Paul. Because of this he was frequently corresponding with a noteworthy and virtuous person who was taking the responsibility to establish it in Vicenza and was already writing the constitutions for it."*<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> M d.C.. R.s.s., P. 2a, p. 78.

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.* pp 77-78

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.* p. 75.

<sup>47</sup> Unabridged Rule: it is Magdalene herself who calls it this way in a letter written to the daughter Marghenta Rosmini, Ep. 111/4, p. 3029.

<sup>48</sup> cf. p. 32, n. 21,

<sup>49</sup> L. Valdani, Vita..., pp. 115-116.

Regarding "such a person" whose name is not given, Magdalene writes to Carolina:

*"You can easily imagine with how much pleasure I heard of the outcome of the meeting with that person... I am convinced that Fr. De Vecchi is perhaps not far from giving permission for the yearned for foundation since I hear that he is giving permission to write .... I shall read with great joy the rules and the Plan. If the Lord blesses our project the former will be very useful".<sup>50</sup>*

Here a "yearned for foundation" and rules are mentioned. Finally, this *known person* has written the Plan, and Carolina sends it to her friend Magdalene who reads it with joy and asks for clarifications:

*"My dear Carolina what a great joy it has been for me to read the Plan which is so much in keeping with my ideas...."<sup>51</sup>*

And in the following letter:

*"Please tell me, is the Institution of this person, that is, the Plan that you sent me... that of St. Vincent modified ?"<sup>52</sup>*

We can deduce that, most probably, this was the anonymous manuscript on which Magdalene writes the "Reflections".

This hypothesis is confirmed by a passage from the Memoirs where the Rule of the Sisters of Charity is mentioned:

*"...then, even though she did it for justified reasons, she had no difficulty in omitting some things set down in the Plan given to her, and replacing them with others having a similar meaning. All this was done with peace, and it seems to her that on other occasions, when some things had been denied her, with the same peace, she insisted as much as she could to obtain them".<sup>53</sup>*

## Chapter IV

### JESUS CRUCIFIED, SUPREME NORM

## Chapter IV

### JESUS CRUCIFIED, SUPREME NORM

#### **"Quietly in her retreat"**

Before she goes to Venice, at the request of the Cavanis Fathers<sup>54</sup>, Magdalene spends two years in the house of St. Joseph in Verona, where God prepares her "with extraordinary sweetness". She annotates this in

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<sup>50</sup> M.d.C., alla Durni, 27 maggio, 1801, Ep. 1, pp. 56-57.

<sup>51</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 2 giugno, 1801. Ep. 1, p. 59.

<sup>52</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 5 giugno, 1801, Ep. 1, pp. 61-62.

<sup>53</sup> M.d.C., Memorie, ms, Q.A., p. 97. A3. II. A C R

<sup>54</sup> Counts Anton'Angelo and Marcantonio Cavanis. These two brothers were born in Venice (in 1772 and 1774 respectively?). They received from their parents, Count Giovanni and Cristina Pasqualigo Basadonna, a Venetian patrician, a markedly religious family education. They were initiated to the magistracy of the Republic. Both became priests, the former in 1793 and the latter in 1806. Because of their work among the youth and the experience of their religious needs, they formed a Marian Congregation for them. Later on, they established schools of charity for poor boys. They founded the Congregation

*"She spent two years in her Retreat in serenity, very happy to be there. Sometime after, at prayer, the Lord prepared her for her first mission to Venice, with extraordinary consolations and a lively desire to work for souls..."<sup>55</sup>*

Here Magdalene is speaking of the years between 1808 and 1810. The quiet life does not prevent her from continuing her apostolic ties with the Milanese group. In 1809, she helps them to find preachers for the Spiritual Exercises for the servants and the barbers. She writes to her friend Carolina:

*"Don Pietro Leonardi asked me to inform you that he accepts your invitation to come to Milan to direct the Spiritual Exercises for the servants. He also said that Msgr. Pacetti whom we have spoken about is ready to come with him. If this suits you please write to me promptly ... P.S. If this does not suit you regarding the servants they would come for other Exercises at least the Canon for sure but the answer had to be precise."<sup>56</sup>*

And after some days:

*"... Don Pietro ... together with Msgr. Pacetti will leave for Milan ... if it pleases the Abbot Gilio they would start the Spiritual Exercises for the barbers on the fifth of the month rather than the sixth. However only if it can be arranged. They would not have any difficulty if it can be arranged to give the Exercises to the servants at the same time giving them to the latter in the morning and to the former in the evening. Don't be upset dear Carolina if I tell you that they have other commitments; the Canon assures me that he will take care of them after the Exercises and that he will come back to Milan anytime that you wish if there is work to be done."<sup>57</sup>*

These letters confirm that Magdalene has, during period, the possibility of speaking about her plans and those of the work directly with her superior, Msgr. Pacetti. Since Carolina would like to have her in Milan, as directress of the hospital, she has to discuss it with the Canon who was in the area as she is ready to do the will of God through his mediation.

*"I have spoken" she writes to her Milanese friend "to the Canon about your hospital as you have told me to; however I did not go into details, which I leave to you. For the rest I don't add anything; speak of that to Him as I am in his hands as you know."<sup>58</sup>*

It is March 12, 1809, and Magdalene, asked again by Carolina, answers thus:

*"I am happy that our two Religious (Don Pietro and Msgr. Pacetti) have begun their work. May the Lord bless it with abundant fruit. Please convey my congratulations to Msgr. Pacetti... As regards your hospital on my part I put the matter in the Lord's hands... When the Canon returns I will hear what has been planned."<sup>59</sup>*

### **Venice: first apostolic experiences**

In May 1810, Magdalene leaves the Retreat of St. Joseph for Venice, called by the Cavanis Brothers to begin the girls' school, parallel to that of the boys which is already functioning.

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of Priests and Teachers of Charity. Both died in Venice, Marcantollio in 1813 and Anton' Angelo, who became blind, in 1858. When they heard about Magdalene of Canossa, they asked her collaboration for the Institution of the poor girls. (cfr. M.d.C., Ep. 1, pp. 339-340 and Ep. 11/1, p. 55).

<sup>55</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. Ia, p. 325.

<sup>56</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 9 febbraio 1809, Ep. I, p. 319

<sup>57</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 21 febbraio 1804, Ep. 1, pp. 319-320.

<sup>58</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 5 marzo 1809, Ep. 1, p. 321.

<sup>59</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 12 marzo 1809, Ep. 1, pp. 322-323



At the time of departure, she confides to Durini all-> her perplexities for the mission to which the Lord calls her, as she had already expressed to Pacetti:

*".. thought it was necessary to manifest some of my reflections to the Canon before fixing my departure. Therefore, my dear, I cannot tell you for sure when, as long as I do not have a decisive answer... Recommend me to the Lord so that he may grant me what I need and may forgive me for the obstacles I have put, when perhaps the moment came to serve him".<sup>60</sup>*

The Memoirs confirm this apprehension:

*"Nevertheless she left, hut with great anxiety always wishing to return as early as possible to her Retreat "<sup>61</sup>*

and to her Milanese friend she writes:

*"...I am writing at the time of departure, overwhelmed by affairs as you can imagine. I will be in Venice on Friday evening, God willing and Saturday, being the day when some good Work will be started, please pray for me, and get others- to pray to the Lord so that everything will turn out well." <sup>62</sup>*

Of this period in which Magdalene is in Venice with Fr. Federico Bonlini,<sup>63</sup> who, afterwards also became one of her secretaries, writes:

*"The noble Marchioness, Magdalene of Canossa, who came to organize a school of charity which was opened by the well-deserving Fathers, Counts De Cavanis, in the convent of the Holy Spirit in Venice, stayed for two months in the Hospice".<sup>64</sup>*

In Venice, the Marchioness is the guest of lady Loredana Priuli<sup>65</sup> who wants to dedicate herself to the assistance of the sick, together with some other ladies.

For them, Magdalene asks Carolina for some books:

*"... my dear Carolina, I have to trouble you. Please send me as soon as possible a copy of that Catechism which you use to instruct the sick in the hospital, and, if it is possible, a brief description of your work in the hospital, as there are some good ladies here who would like to imitate what is being done in Milan .... my dear Carolina, I know that you will be very happy, that at least with this material we can both co-operate in this good work. I am very well. I am staying with a certain lady Priuli, whom I believe you know, and I go whenever I can to this Retreat of the Holy Spirit where the school has started five days ago. When this is a little more stabilized, I will return home, if it pleases the Lord... Do me the charity to pray much to the Lord that I may do well the little I have to do".<sup>66</sup>*

Sending again to Carolina a "Detailed report of the beginning of the Institute", dated 1816, Magdalene expresses herself thus, speaking about her first trip to Venice:

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<sup>60</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 15 aprile 1810. Ep.1, 336-337

<sup>61</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. Ia, p. 325

<sup>62</sup> M.d.C., alla Dunni, 8 maggio 1810, Ep. I pp. 339-340

<sup>63</sup> Federico Bonlini, of noble lineage, was born in Venice in 1776 H. ordained a priest in 18(K. He dedicated his life to teaching and gratuitous assistance in the two Institutlons for boys and girls of the Cavanis Brothers. He died in Venice on Jan.10, 1855.

<sup>64</sup> Federico Bonl ini, manoscritto autografo, A4, 1, A.C.R. (cf.

<sup>65</sup> For biographical notes on lady Loredana Priuli, cfr. M.d.C. Ep. I, p. 645.

<sup>66</sup> M d C.. alla Dunni, S giugno 1810, Ep. 1, pp. 341-342

*"Two years after I was living there<sup>67</sup>, I was called to Venice to help with the establishment of a school of charity, which the Cavanis Brothers wished to open. Since Canon Pacetti was here, he commanded me to give, at the same time, a helping hand, a thing which I did, to promote a group of Ladies for the assistance to the sick in these hospitals in their extreme spiritual needs, in imitation of the Pious Union of Charity in Milan. It has pleased the Lord to bring it to fruition, though at the present, it is very limited in number. After two months, I returned to St. Joseph's in Verona ..."*<sup>68</sup>

In Verona, Magdalene remains worried because it seems to her that she has not corresponded fully with God's will for the good of souls, and from this interior pain, the desire to let herself be totally and solely guided by obedience to God and to her director, grows in her.

Referring to this experience, she writes in the Memoirs:

*"She returned (to Verona) ... after two months, but the command of obedience was necessary at that time to reassure her, as it seemed to her that she had neglected the good of souls to follow her own ideas. She repeatedly resolved that, if God would once again put her to work, she would leave everything to obedience..."*<sup>69</sup>

And on July 10, 1810, she writes to Carolina:

*"I am finally back in Verona, my dear Carolina .... I thank you sincerely for the hook for the hospital and for the rules regarding the same ... it seems that truly the Lord wishes to have the same charity for the poor and sick of Venice as is being done in Milan, and much more so, since it can be done with a government that wishes it. you have given me the rules for the Ladies, now I wish to ask for those for the Gentlemen . . ."*<sup>70</sup>

From July 1810 to July 1811, Magdalene remains in the retreat of St. Joseph's. She takes care of all the problems of the house and of the companions, and prepares herself for the real "Institution of the Sisters of Charity"<sup>71</sup> as it was becoming clearer in her mind after the experience of the Work of the Cavanis Brothers and of the Ladies of Venice. The Congregation of Charity desired by "many persons"<sup>72</sup> now becomes the responsibility of the "one most weak instrument"<sup>73</sup> of which the Lord will make use of to found the Canossian Institute.

In the Memoirs it is confirmed:

*"Another year passed by (July 1810-1811), during which she remained willingly in her Retreat, where it seemed to her that her presence was needed for its smooth running. However, she never forgot the Institute of the Daughters of Charity..."*<sup>74</sup>

Magdalene, even while remaining in Verona, does not take her eyes off Venice and the group of Venetian ladies who are assisting the sick. It is the same lady Loredana Priuli who, writing to her, gives her news of the change of venue of the Cavanis' Work for the girls, from the Convent of the Holy Spirit to that of the Eremite. She takes the opportunity to make known to those responsible some elements necessary for the internal discipline and smooth running of the Boarding School. In fact, Magdalene writes to Fr. Count Antonio Cavanis on June 18, 1811:

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<sup>67</sup> Verona.

<sup>68</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 30 gennaio 1816, Ep. 1, p. 435

<sup>69</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. Ia, p. 325.

<sup>70</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 10 luglio 1810, Ep. 1, pp. 342-343.

<sup>71</sup> Magdalene refers to the incipient Institute of the Daughters of Charity which, initially, she also often calls Sisters of Charity.

<sup>72</sup> cfr. M d.C., Piano B. 7-7, Ep. 11/2, p. 1420

<sup>73</sup> cfr. M.d.C., Piano B. 8-8, Ep. 11/2, p. 1422.

<sup>74</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. I a p. 325.

*"The esteemed Lady Priuli wrote to me about the Institution being transferred to another locality ... Reflecting however on the experience we made last year, I thought of taking the liberty to remind you, if it is possible, not to introduce the practice of having the poor women coming to draw water from inside the Monastery ... I thought I had to call your attention to two other things ... the first is that, now, with the change of venue, it will be easy to obtain permission to preserve the Blessed Sacrament.... When there will be the opportunity to carry out some renovations, I think that a single dormitory will allow for better supervision, and the girls will never be alone by day or night."<sup>75</sup>*

Magdalene's interest in the Venetian works is also revealed in a letter addressed to Don Galvani in which she solicits him in their imminent encounter to complete the Catechism prepared for the instruction of the sick together with that for the dying:

*"I have received Lady Priuli's letter; she will be here (in Verona) on Tuesday evening. If I can steal some moments from your work, you will do me a great favour to come, not only for the discussion, but most of all, for the Doctrine of the Hospitallers of Venice, which I would like also to give to the same Lady Priuli."<sup>76</sup>*

Even from Milan, the friends keep pressurizing in order to have the Marchioness as collaborator in the hospital of this Lombard city, but she responds, justifying the refusal:

*"... Marquis Arconati ... has spoken to me of your works in Milan, but to tell you the truth, I cannot see how I can do that besides my work here. I cannot deny, however, that I have your hospital at heart, but according to my poor way of thinking, there is need for something very sound in order to offer it real and stable help. Besides, I think there is need for much prayer so that the Lord will grant all that is necessary, especially capable persons, who have the spirit and the capability. Though by divine mercy I have the vocation, I sincerely tell you that I do not have neither one nor the other. I do not wish, my dear, to do injustice to my vocation, but even in the work of charity, the Lord calls some for little things and others for great things."<sup>77</sup>*

Meanwhile, in Oct. 1811, Lady Loredana Priuli, on behalf of the Cavanis Brothers, accompanies two Venetian girls to Verona, and asks Magdalene to prepare them to become teachers for the girls' school of the Cavanis. Magdalene, writing to her friend Carolina, says:

*"... I let you know that there is no doubt that this spring ... I will return (to Venice) since I have here with me, for already three months, two teachers brought to me by Lady Priuli to be Prepared for the Retreat of Venice, with the promise that I would take them back when they will be ready for the task. My dear Carolina, remember to pray for me and ask others to pray to Our Lady of Sorrows so that we can do real good and not just apparently."<sup>78</sup>*

### **Charismatic intuition**

The two years spent in the Retreat in Verona and the apostolic experience in Venice make Magdalene open to receive strong charismatic enlightenment from God. Thus she recounts:

*"... seven or eight months, and perhaps before she started this new work<sup>79</sup>, she felt called to imitate Jesus Christ more closely, especially in his poverty, humility and service ..."<sup>80</sup>*

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<sup>75</sup> M.d.C., al P. Antonio Cavanis, 11 luglio 1811, Ep. II/1, pp. 55-56.

<sup>76</sup> M.d.C., a Don Nicola Galvani, I X 11 giugno Ep. 11/1, p. 58.

<sup>77</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini 7 settembre 1811. Ep. 1, p. 358.

<sup>78</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini 20 dicembre 1811, Ep. 1, p. 361.

<sup>79</sup> In Venice

<sup>80</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. 1a, p. 337.

This first intuition is a personal call to the imitation of Christ Crucified and precedes that more intense and specific one which regards the foundational charism, centred on Christ Crucified. The Memoirs state:

*"... she felt urged to follow Christ Crucified<sup>81</sup> . . . something which, in prayer, six or seven months before going to Venice to start this foundation, she had a similar experience, but only as an intellectual enlightenment .... She believes that it was then that she looked to the virtues of Christ Crucified for inspiration to write the Rules of the Daughters of Charity, that is, of the Institute "<sup>82</sup>*

Magdalene, in the Memoirs, reveals that in 1811, the mystical experiences are repeated, and confesses her own inability to express with "distinct" words the mysterious and intimate work of God in her:

*"... the Lord began to draw her closer than ever in prayer. As she cannot remember things clearly, she will write only those that come to her mind."<sup>83</sup>*

The expressions, "once", "other times", "in the course of the same year", refer to events which happened between July 1811 and April 1812. The special graces which Magdalene receives in prayer are directed to her mission as Foundress: God strengthens in her the desire to seek Him alone, His glory, and the salvation of souls through the imitation of Christ Crucified, in a life of detachment and charity.

Again in the Memoirs we read:

*"Once she found herself united to God so intensely, with a feeling of a love so strong, that she was almost unaware of what was happening around her. The outcome was that she felt compelled to seek nothing else but God alone and to commit herself to serving others..."<sup>84</sup>*

And again:

*"At other times, always during prayer, whether out of love for God or an ardent desire for the salvation of souls, she offered herself .... to the Lord to go anywhere, promising not to act as she had done on other occasions."<sup>85</sup>*

As her Director exhorted her to do the will of God, she felt ever willing to do so, but wishing and expecting that God should be glorified. She felt so spurred to seek the salvation of souls that she offered herself to the Lord to remain in Purgatory until the day of Judgement..."<sup>86</sup>

And again in 1811 she writes:

*"in the course of that same year, when she was at prayer, she felt moved and drawn to imitate Jesus Christ. These desires were preceded at times by that intense spiritual union with God accompanied by strong feelings of love. Besides the wish to imitate Jesus Christ, there was the desire to leave everything, especially her Retreat and all that she possessed. It seemed to her that, because of her weakness and the great affection for her companions, it was not possible for her to serve God with the perfection He asked of her by remaining where she was."<sup>87</sup>*

God's action is revealed more intensely during the Spiritual Exercises of 1811:

*"I am aware that all my faults are due to the fact that in all that I do, I do not seek God alone, and even when I do so, I do not seek Him through the exercise of humility, obedience and intense mortification ....*

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<sup>81</sup> This refers to the mystical experience that happened, probably in Holy Week of 1795.

<sup>82</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. Ia, p. 320.

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.* p. 326

<sup>84</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. ma, p. 325.

<sup>85</sup> cf. Chap. 4 note 8.

<sup>86</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. Ia, p. 325.

<sup>87</sup> M d C., R.s.s.. P. I a, p. 326.

*I feel urged to follow Jesus Christ, humble, obedient and poor, but interiorly I feel, and this I also felt sometimes at prayer before the Spiritual Exercises and I feel so at times even now, that God wants from me something else, more humble, more recollected, but always working for others. Through this, I may imitate lit im more closely, despising even the world, but I do not know clearly what this is. Meanwhile, I resolved to practise now the three virtues mentioned above to prepare myself for what God may ask of me afterwards.*<sup>168</sup>

Magdalene lives intense experiences of union with God. This almost habitually felt presence of the Lord gives her light and strength:

*"The impression which remained in her after this prayer was so strong that it was enough to sustain her, just as the Lord does presently in the midst of everything which he allowed her to experience in the Work, from the beginning to the present moment.*<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> *ibid*, pp. 409 and 413

<sup>89</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. Ia, p. 326.

## Chapter V

### UNDER THE ACTION OF THE SPIRIT

What was the Lord asking from Magdalene?

The motives for her second trip to Venice can be found in her writings: the request of Don Lorenzo Piazza<sup>1</sup> who wishes to have the foundation of a Canossian House in Venice similar to that of Verona. Thus Magdalene records in her Memoirs:

*"In the meantime the Lord created the opportunity to return to Venice where He had inspired a holy Religious<sup>2</sup> and some other persons with the desire to have the Daughters of Charity established in that city. Great was the amazement and the consolation of this person, when on receiving a letter from this religious, she discerned that his project was similar to the one she had cherished for a long time and had disclosed to him."<sup>3</sup>*

On March 20, 1812, Magdalene writes to Carolina:

*"If nothing happens to forestall it, then I should be going after octave of Easter<sup>4</sup> to Venice ..."<sup>5</sup>*

Magdalene returned to Venice for a second reason. The Cavanis Fathers who had transferred the Institute for the girls from the convent of the Holy Spirit to the ex-monastery of the "Romite" Augustinians in the parish of St. Trivaso, were asking for her help.

On June 2, Magdalene asks Carolina to address her mail to the Priuli House at St. Trovaso:

*"... I am writing to you from Venice where I am for more than one and a half months now, as you have probably heard from Leopoldina, and where I do not know how long I will remain ... Between the retreat of these girls at the "Romite" and ... the Hospital, I'm, really very busy."<sup>6</sup>*

Meanwhile, Leopoldina Naudet who remained alone at Verona as Superior of the community of St. Joseph, begs Magdalene to give news of herself:

*"Wake up from sleep, and write. May the Lord bless all you will undertake for His Glory, these are my wishes ... give my respects to the Canon and Don Lorenzo to whose prayers I recommend myself . . . "<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Don Lorenzo Piazza, a Venetian priest who came to know Magdalene of Canossa, admired her personal gifts and, in particular, her capacity to organize. Because of this, when she had almost completed her work with the Cavanis Institution, he insisted with Canon Pacetti to convince her, as it happened, to establish in Venice an institution like the one she had in Verona.

He had been the temporary confessor of the first Canossians, working closely

with her. He had seen her with the Marchioness during the most crucial moments of the foundation, and acted often as her secretary, writing many of her letters. He died in 1814.

<sup>2</sup> It is Don Lorenzo Piazza.

<sup>3</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., p. Ia, p. 316.

<sup>4</sup> In 1812, Easter fell on March 29, therefore Magdalene reached Venice after April 5.

<sup>5</sup> M.d.C. alla Durini 20 marzo 1812, Ep. 1, p. 363

<sup>6</sup> M.d.C. alla Durini 2 giugno 1812, Ep. 1, p. 364

<sup>7</sup> Leopoldina Naudet, a M.D.C. 30 aprile 1812, ms. autografo, A2, XXII, A.C.R.

After more than three months, Magdalene writes to Carolina

*"... I want to tell you the reason why I am still in Venice ... it is regarding what I will tell you and of which you will remember that we spoke about when you brought me the letter of Don Lorenzo Piazza, and for which I asked you to pray much. In affect I found that he had the project of the Sisters of Charity. To say it in a few words, one of these gentlemen had also prepared it..."<sup>8</sup>*

And a teacher of the Cavanis Institute, Catterina Fabris, when sending to M. Rosa Dabala' a testimony on Magdalene of Canossa, writes thus:

*"In the year 1812, the Venerable Marchioness returned to Venice ... on that occasion, she stayed in our convent of the ex-Romite Augustinians in San Trovaso where the Cavanis Fathers had transferred us with the Institution for the girls. This time the Marchioness remained with us for four months, and though she was busy with the foundation of her House... nonetheless, she continued to help us to the best of her ability, so that the Cavanis Institute of the School of Charity for girls could have a good start."<sup>9</sup>*

Another testimony of the period spent by Magdalene in Venice and of her activities there, is offered by Fr. Federico Bonlini:

*"She remained for four months in the Institution of the Cavanis Fathers which had been transferred from the Convent of the Holy Spirit to that of the "Romite" Augustinians. During that time, she was working for the public school and the formation of the teachers. Like everybody else she was living a common life, taking the same food and keeping all the other regulations of a poor and hard life."<sup>10</sup>*

During this second stay in Venice, Magdalene is not as much preoccupied for the Cavanis Institution as for the foundation of a new House of the Institute, after that of Verona.

That this motivation is dominant, can be clearly seen from the Memoirs, where nothing is said about the service given to the Cavanis Institution.

She is accompanied by Elisabetta Mezzaroli, also called "Betta". The choice of this companion is marked by a direct and extraordinary intervention of God.

Elisabetta, who came from Villafranca, had recently joined the Institute in Verona and spent the time of her formation there. Her spiritual director, Msgr. Pacetti noticed, as Magdalene also did, that this daughter "possessed extraordinary and supernatural gifts."<sup>11</sup>

From a report written by the same E. Mezzaroli, after the death of the Foundress, we come to know why this choice was made:

*"I was in Verona with the Marchioness, when the transactions for the foundation of a House in Venice were under way, in 1812. She was very anxious, not knowing whom to take with her to Venice, from among the companions she had then in Verona. She was praying much in order to discern the will of God. One morning I went to the choir loft to pray, and all of a sudden I felt a great desire to make amends for the great damage caused to Religion by the general suppression of the Regular Orders which were therefore dying out during the period. But, reflecting on my incapacity, I did not know how to do it. Then I heard interiorly these words addressed to me: Go, offer yourself to your Superior who must establish, with My help, a foundation with which she will give me great glory. I, however, was excusing myself, saying that the Marchioness would not know what to do with me. But the interior impulses were such that I finally decided to go to her.*

*As soon as I took the decision, a vezy frightful figure appeared that was making many gestures and showing its will to destroy me. Taken aback by great fear, I ran out of the choir loft and did not have the courage to keep the promise I made to go to my Superior. In the afternoon, I went back to the choir loft. As soon as I arrived, I felt struck by a blow and heard a voice saying: "Have you the courage to resist the voice of God? Go right away to your Superior and offer yourself to her to save souls. I immediately f*

<sup>8</sup> M.d.C. alla Dunni 9 agosto 1812, Ep. 1, p.367

<sup>9</sup> Handwritten testimony of Catterina Fabris, one of the teachers of the Cavanis Institution. A4. A.C.R.

<sup>10</sup> Fedenco Bonlini, ms. A4, 1, A.C.R.

<sup>11</sup> F. Bonlini, ms. autografo, A4, 1, A.C.R.

led, because I could not resist it. As soon as I told the Marchioness what happened, she did not show any surprise at all, because, it seems to me, she already knew everything. She only said: May the Lord be blessed for answering my prayers. Take courage, you will go with me to Venice, and let the devil shout as much as he wants, because with the help of God, we will not fear."<sup>12</sup>

A mysterious Spur from heaven

Magdalene, comforted by such special divine intervention, describes her arrival at Venice:

"As soon as she arrived in Venice, that very evening she was told about the Work, and she again spoke to the Lord about it. Once again, and perhaps more than ever, she began to feel herself closely united with God ... that feeling of love continued to grow in her and this happened very frequently. Sometimes the inner feeling was so intense that it exhausted her so much that she was not even able to eat. But she remained always encouraged to undertake the Work, as she had up to then desired. She felt strengthened to the point of having sufficient courage to even start on her own, if no other means were available, though, later, she was sometimes assailed by fears and lack of trust which only the patience of the Lord could hear."<sup>13</sup>

During this period, the interior action of God, while weakening her body to the point of exhaustion, infuses in her spirit such a courage as to undertake the Work even "on her own".

The change from the preceding stage of uncertainty to this of a strong will to continue the transactions for the establishment and spread of the Institute, is, probably, determined by a vision of our Lady, which the Marchioness herself related to Elisabetta Mezzaroli and Anna Rizzi.

Anna Rizzi testifies thus:

"Our Foundress, Marchioness Magdalene of Canossa, told me many times, while talking about the beginnings of the Institute, that, in 1812, our first Superior, Msgr. Pacetti, who was in Rome, had asked a holy soul one of his penitents, to recommend to the Lord this work he was planning together with our Marchioness, in order to know if it was God's will to continue their holy projects. While praying, this soul had the following vision: it seemed to her to see Mary and, next to her, her Divine Son who said: "Tell your Director to continue his transactions with courage, because this Institute will be established, since my Mother wants it."

Besides, she was telling me that she and the said Superior agreed that, on his return from Venice, they would decide about the colour and style of the habit. But meanwhile, in Venice, a good soul (the Marchioness herself) had another vision: it seemed to this soul to be in a large field where she saw the Blessed Virgin together with six young women next to her. They were dressed in a dark brown habit with a cap and the image of OUR Lady of Sorrows hanging from their neck. Mary took two of the ladies, caressed them and then guided them to a Church where Christian doctrine classes were on: she exhorted them to teach, and after blessing them, she left them there.

She took another two to a place where there was a great number of poor girls whom she exhorted them to educate and instruct. After having caressed and blessed them also, she went to the third group, took them to a hospital where there were many sick patients. Then having blessed them all, the vision disappeared.

I was told these things by our Foundress, who was relating them in the third person, but from the following circumstances, it can be deduced that it was she herself who had received the vision. First, because she, at that time was in Venice, and also because she did not wait for the return of the Superior to decide on the style and colour of the habit; she composed the Rules and specified the Branches of the Institute according to the said vision, she herself told me that the Superior, on his return from Rome, approved everything. Both shed many tears considering the great mercy of God and the powerful protection of Mary."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Notes about the first companions, ms. A4 1, pp. 6-X. A.C.R. (cf. T. Piccari, op. cit ..., pp. 245-246).

<sup>13</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., p. Ia, p. 327.

<sup>14</sup> A memo of the Marchioness, autographic ms. of Anna Rizzi, A4 1, A.C.R.



The testimony of Elizabetta Mezzaroli confirms and proves all that Anna Rizzi reveals both in regard to Msgr. Pacetti and to the vision of our Lady, but she concludes differently:

*"The Marchioness related this to me to encourage me in those beginnings. But it was in the third person, as she used to do in similar circumstances. The fact which made me sure that she was the person who had the vision is that during that period in Venice, she wrote the Rules. She specified in them the five Branches of Charity of the Institute, and decided on the colour and style of the habit. Everything was according to the said vision. She was so sure, contrary to her usual way, as to establish everything even before the Superior returned from Rome. When he returned, he approved with many tears, thanking the Lord and our Lady."<sup>15</sup>*

A third proof that the Rules were written in 1812 and which guarantees, at the same time, the originality of their inspiration, comes from the testimony of Don Federico Bonlini, secretary of Magdalene at that time.

In the Canossian Archives in Rome there is an original and autobiographic manuscript of his entitled: "Brief notes about some facts of the admirable life of the pious Lady Magdalene, Marchioness of Canossa, Foundress of the Congregation of the Daughters of Charity". The document is counter-signed in order to guarantee its authenticity, by Don Sebastiano Casara<sup>16</sup>, Superior of the Cavanis Institute at the time the document had been written. In it we read:

*"The undersigned writer of these brief memoirs has been honoured by the confidence of this pious Lady, so dear to afflicted humanity, for whose woes, mainly the spiritual, she had great concern. I had the undeserved pleasure of becoming her material instrument, while taking the dictation of those Rules which formed, and still form the admirable basis of her Institute. On that occasion which lasted for three long months, the writer knew the spirit of that wise moderator. She dictated her Rules on the spirit and discipline in such a way that it seemed she was reading from a book a treatise of the purest morals and of the most perfect asceticism. So great was the concentration of her spirit, the clarity of her ideas, the grace with which she spoke, the order and, I would say, the easy manner with which she dealt with things of such importance which would serve as the guiding norms of an approved Institute, that the words seemed to flow spontaneously, suggested interiorly by the Spirit of the Lord who saw her as another Seraph of Carmel, Foundress of a Congregation of Charity whose beneficial and various branches embrace many classes of people in need of help."<sup>17</sup>*

That Don Federico Bonlini has been the person who wrote the first Rule under dictation, is confirmed both by a letter of Msgr. Pacetti to Magdalene, and a letter of Magdalene herself to Elena Bernardi.

On Sept. 30, 1812 Msgr. Pacetti writes thus:

*"I am happy for everything and also for your faithful secretary..."<sup>18</sup>*

And later the Marchioness writes to E. Bernardi:

*"Not even today can I write to AMincola, as I am still organizing those Papers<sup>19</sup> that F. Bonlini, you and I have written."<sup>20</sup>*

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<sup>15</sup> Notes about the first companions. ms., A4 1, pp. 8-9, A.C.R.

<sup>16</sup> Fedenco Bonlini ms. autografo A4 1, A.C.R.

NB. The previous draft of the Memoirs had been handwritten by the late Very Rev. Don Federico Bonlini, priest of rare piety, deep humility, very delicate conscience. He spent his life assisting assiduously and gratuitously the Ven. Cavanis Brothers in both of their Institutions, but especially in that for girls, mentioned above. Fr. Sebastiano Casara was the Superior of the two Institutions at that time. (cf. T. Piccari, op. cit. p. 858).

<sup>17</sup> Fedenco Bonlini, ms. A4 1, A.C.R. ( cf. T. Piccari, op. cit. p. 857).

<sup>18</sup> Mons. Pacetti a Maddalena di Canossa, 30 September 1812, ms. A2, XXXI, A.C.R

<sup>19</sup> it is Elena Bernardi who went to Venice with the Foundress in September 1814 (cf. Stofella, Biografia di Maddalena di Canossa, unpublished Work vol. 11 p. 295).

<sup>20</sup> M.d.C. alla Bernardi 30 gennaio 1819, Ep. 111/1, p. 242

## A new shoot springs up

All the details about the vision of our Lady and the drawing up of the Rules, given in the reports of Anna Rizzi, Betta Mezzaroli and Don Federico Bonlini, are not found in the Memoirs, probably because these had been written for Msgr. Pacetti who already knew everything. But they are just mentioned:

*"In the meantime, the negotiations<sup>21</sup> were well under way. Finally the day arrived in which they were to be finalized. While she was praying fervently for favourable results, she had an inner certainty that they had been concluded according to her desires, as she told the one who was directing her<sup>22</sup> when he came to inform her about the outcome of the transactions".<sup>23</sup>*

Also after the conclusion of the transactions for the foundation of a house in Venice, many difficulties which delay the beginning of the Work itself, remain to be solved. The departure of Pacetti, who returns to his hometown for reasons of health, leaves Magdalene, as well as Msgr. Pacetti, use the word 'Papers' the Rules. Magdalene deprived of a help she considers necessary But God wants her ever more detached from human support to convince her that the Work is His alone She herself comments thus:

*"As soon as this (transaction) was definitively finalized ... God led this person, not only to dedicate herself to this Work, but also to carry it out truly without any support, just as He had made her desire many times before ... He allowed the one who was directing her to leave suddenly She felt very disappointed at this, also because of the general situation of the place.... After the one who was directing her had left she continued to see to the matter, since there was still someone who was interested in the Work<sup>24</sup>, and she succeeded in settling it. This person, being as she believes, oppressed and tempted about what she was undertaking ... received Holy Communion, after which she felt as though newly strengthened to undertake the Work and ... believed she understood that the Lord wanted to use her in many places to establish this Work.<sup>25</sup>*

The first desire of Magdalene is to find a monastery for the forthcoming foundation, but she is compelled by circumstances to accept the proposal of Madame Iuli who offers the temporary use of a private home situated in Campo S. Andrea in the district of Santa Croce. Magdalene describes the beginnings of the Work her Milanese friend in this way:

*"Now I wish to tell you why I am still in Venice. I did the little I could at the "Eremita" ... I have been made to believe that the Lord wanted me to help for a while to start this new Work for which, initially, I wished to have a monastery. But afterwards, it was felt best to start it tentatively in a private House rented for this purpose. In fact, they found a suitable one, where I am for eight days now, with two other companions... Be it known that these Sisters will not assist sick women in their homes, but they will carry out these three Branches: charity schools, visits and assistance as needed in the hospitals, helping in these especially with instruction. The treatment for persons with sores and in need of other simple first-aid, will be done in the house itself, in the section destined for it".<sup>26</sup>*

Magdalene officially begins the Work in Venice on August 1, 1812 with only two companions: Elisabetta Mezzaroli, who came with her from Verona, and Francesca Ghezzi, ex-Superior of the suppressed Monastery of the DIMESSE of Murano, who joined them on April 26, 1812. In this regard, it is stated in the Memoirs:

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<sup>21</sup> Transaction between Don Lorenzo Piazza and Msgr. Pacetti, and that between Msgr. Pacetti and Rome

<sup>22</sup> it refers to Msgr. Pacetti who returned from Rome

<sup>23</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. 1a p. 327

<sup>24</sup> They are Don Lorenzo Piazza and Lady Loredana Priuli

<sup>25</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. 1a. pp.27-328

<sup>26</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 9 August, 1812 Ep. 1, p. 367-368.

*"In the meantime, the day arrived when the Work was to be started, Saturday, August 1. It was also the first of the seven Saturdays dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows in this Diocese. The Lord started at once to let her savour poverty, even though He always provided sufficiently for the needs of the Work. He put this person and her two companions in situations where they had to begin detaching themselves even from spiritual help ...,"<sup>27</sup>*

With the exception of the visits to the hospital, the apostolic activities do not start with the opening of the house. The Daughters of Charity take pains instead to prepare themselves for the new mission with the Spiritual Exercises.

Magdalene writes in the Memoirs:

*"Because they were only three ... for two months they did not take up any particular work except visits to the hospital and preparations for the future. During this time they made the Spiritual Exercises..."<sup>28</sup>*

On Sept. 12, she writes to her friend Carolina:

*"I am very well, and the matter for which I stayed behind is going on well, with God's help, but it progresses very slowly, not because of the work itself, but because, up to now, the number of those who have to work in such a vast field has not increased. I hope, however, that within a few days this too will begin."<sup>29</sup>*

### **From mystical experiences**

From the opening of the house in Campo S. Andrea<sup>30</sup> till the transfer of the Work to the monastery of St. Lucia, there is a short but fruitful period for the life of the Foundress, and especially with regard to the clarification of the charismatic character of the Institute. It is a period, during which, in the Memoirs, Magdalene emphasizes more the spiritual phenomena than her concern for temporal matters. This is due to the fact that there is a companion next to her who, like her, is endowed with mystical experiences, which most of the time confirm those of Magdalene. Fr. Bonlini himself testifies:

*"The Writer had also the good fortune to be informed by the pious Lady of a spiritual secret which she was obliged to manifest by the one who guided her<sup>31</sup>, to the person chosen to put in writing all that she could not do, due to her poor health....*

*This is the secret: one of her daughters, endowed with extraordinary and supernatural gifts of God, had to he, as the others were, guided by her in this difficult career. Till things were kept between Mother and daughter, everything remained silent, and nothing, or almost nothing, transpired about these gifts... But when the Mother was compelled to manifest them in writing, through somebody else's hand, then one could see the heroic battle between humility trying to hide them, and truth having to manifest them, which shows ... that the Superior herself; who had to disclose the virtues and gifts of her daughter, was endowed with the same abundance of heavenly blessings. The priest was astonished, confounded and moved, considering the feelings of that beautiful and most humble heart, expressed by a face now turning pale and now red, by trembling limbs, by sobbing, and also by tears mixed with broken words with which the good servant of the Lord was declaring her unworthiness, the mercy of God, and the desire that he would not have any esteem for her, but that all the glory would be given to the Lord. The priest who is writing knew then how greatly favoured she had been with those same gifts which the Lord had endowed that daughter of hers..."<sup>32</sup>*

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<sup>27</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P.la, p. 328

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 329.

<sup>29</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 12 settembre, 1812 Ep. 1, p. 369

<sup>30</sup> The stay at St. Andrea from August 1, 1812 to Oct. 9, 1813.

<sup>31</sup> Msgr. Pacetti was contemporarily spiritual director of Magdalene and Betta Mezzaroli.

<sup>32</sup> Don Fedenco Bonlini, ms. A4 1, A. C. R. (cf. T. Piccari, op. cil. pp. 857-858).

The spiritual enlightenments of Magdalene and of Betta, which they received in perfect sympathy most of the time, are all directed at nourishing and unifying the spirit of the Rule, entirely pervaded by the Spirit of Jesus Crucified.

The passage of the Memoirs, dated September 9 shows that, in the preceding months, the fundamental points of the Rule had already been dictated:

*"The known person made the novena of Our Lady's Nativity to obtain, through her intercession, the grace to be born anew in the Spirit of Jesus Crucified according to the spirit of the Work ... On the morning of the Feast of Our Lady, she received communion though she was greatly troubled, but later, during common prayers, it seemed to her, so to say, that she regained the favours of Mary, for whom she believed she did not have the usual affection and trust for some months; this consoled her greatly .... The following morning, as she started meditating, while gazing at the Crucifix, she felt represented interiorly to her the patience of Jesus Christ, His sufferings, His poverty, His humiliations. She was reminded of the promises made several times to Him to obtain a vocation that would require imitation of Him ... understanding that this was the time and the vocation that God wanted from this soul ... She protested to the Lord that she did not want to ask even for companions, but that on her part, she would do all she could, not seeking anything but her own sanctification .... She had an inner enlightenment on the significance of seeking God alone and Christ Crucified as stated in the Rule... Furthermore, she felt that if she really sought God alone and the Most Holy Virgin in the way the Lord was showing her .... God and the Holy Virgin would always assist this soul .... The following day .... during Holy Communion, as it seemed to her that she would give herself to the Lord just as He was giving Himself to her, she felt closely united to Him. This lasted for some time, and made her determined to keep the resolutions she had made. The text: "Torcular calcavi soles et de gente mea anus non est mecum" came up before her, whether it was through imagination or in the usual way, she does not know. she says that never before had she realized, as at that moment, the meaning of that point of the Rule about seeking God alone, and how to do it. "*<sup>33</sup>

That the Rule was already drawn up, is confirmed by the above quotation. In fact, it is twice said: "as stated in the Rule" and "the point of the Rule". Magdalene is concerned that the Work be established in the true spirit of Christ. In this regard she is comforted by what "Betta" confides to her:

*"She had the order from her Superior to offer Mass for the sisters of Charity. At the moment of consecration, while deeply recollected in prayer she had an insight into the corruption present in the world, and how this Work will remedy it. Then she also saw Jesus Christ...His holy humanity .... offering Himself, his blood, to the Eternal Father for this Work. Beside she saw a large number of souls who would be saved through the visits to the hospitals and the schools of charity; and she says that they were truly many She did not see this with the eyes of the body... the vision had only been an intellectual enlightenment,"*<sup>34</sup>

The remembrance of such an experience is renewed every time Betta gets near the place where she had that vision and it remains very vivid, even after about five months, when she recounts further details to Magdalene

The narration continues thus:

*"After seeing the corruption of the world, she, besides, saw some Daughters of Charity, dressed in ash-grey habits. She saw Jesus Christ offering them and those souls to the eternal Father...and notes that there were many who would be saved with the help of these Daughters of Charity. Her Superior asked her if these daughters were many, she answered that they were not many. she also asked whether among these Daughters of Charity she recognised any, and the answer was no. The Superior also asked some other details about the habit of the same Sisters, but she said that she remembered*

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<sup>33</sup> M.d.C., Memorie, ms. Q.B., pp. 73-77, A3 11, A.C.R. (cf. T. Piccari, op. cit. pp 374-376).

*nothing but the colour of the habit, which, however, she knew had already been fixed before the vision itself.*

*Besides, she said that it seemed she had them constantly before her eyes, and that they would bring about good, a great good, to the Church.*<sup>35</sup>

### **... and from life situations**

While enlightenments from above could be a comfort in the difficulties related to the troubled beginnings of the foundation, the lack of financial means gave the Foundress the occasion to clarify some essential things in the life of the Institute, not only for that time but also for the future:

*"In the meantime, two companions had come ... When they arrived, the first companion, knowing that they were without stable means of subsistence, during dinner, thought that her Superior had been foolish in receiving them without any dowry. She was also thinking of what the Superior would do when she had nothing more to give to anyone. While she was thinking in this way, she received a strong push and heard the Lord saying: "Do you think that I cannot maintain them?"*<sup>36</sup>

This incident not only consoles the Superior, but teaches both of them that, in spite of the lack of persons and material goods, the Lord keeps watch and works with His unfailing Providence. The most serious problem is not the maintenance of the subjects, but to have "open eyes" in selecting them. Such a recommendation is insistently made to Magdalene by the protector of the Work:

*"Remember to keep your eyes open in the choice of Companions. One alone is enough to spoil the desire of the Sovereign who wishes to see it spread. May God allow you to get the two, of whom you wrote to me. For the rest, let everyone try, according to the Work of charity, to form herself in the spirit of charity itself, which will be only a mask if it is not sustained by recollection and interior mortification. Oh, how much concerned I am to see that many persons, while sanctifying themselves, sanctify others too. I never forget you in all my prayers. God will bless such a beautiful Work, which, just for this, has deserved the approval of the Sovereign."*<sup>37</sup>

A month later, Msgr. Pacetti writes again:

*"I received from Mr. Domenico and Don Lorenzo the most consoling news about your Work. Don Lorenzo tells me what to do with poor women who wish to join. As for me, I would advise you not to burden yourself so much for the time being. If you think they are very good, keep them in mind. If later, help is found, then you may accept some, but keep the norm which you must never disregard, with the exception of particular and rare cases."*<sup>38</sup>

Magdalene, in the beginning of October 1812, goes to Padua, because she desires to undertake works of charity with new helpers.

She writes to her brother, Bonifacio:

*"I came to Padua with .... Lady Priuli to take a young woman who has come to Venice to help in the works of charity. On the same day I arrived, the level of the river rose to such an extent as to make it impossible, as it is still the case now, to go back to Venice ... I have been staying with the said lady for twelve days already.*

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<sup>35</sup> *ibid*, p. 417.

<sup>36</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s. P. 1a, pp. 330-331

<sup>37</sup> Pacetti a M.d.C., 30 settembre 1812, ms. A2, XXXI, A.C.R.

<sup>38</sup> Mons. Pacetti a M.d.C., 24 ottobre 1812, ms. A2, XXXI, A.C.R. M d C. al fratello Bonifacio 24 ottobre 1812. Ep. III/5. pp. 3917-391

*Pray ... that the things in which the Lord has put me just as the figurehead may go on well, since he does everything.*"<sup>39</sup>

About the vicissitudes of the journey to Padua and of her perplexities to accept the two aspirants, Magdalene must probably have informed Msgr. Pacetti, who answers:

*"I am happy you are back from Padua and especially that you have not returned alone ... but for charity's sake, weigh them, sift them and, if possible, put them to the test to see whether they are suitable, so as not to waste time with the comings and goings of others. Moreover, resolve everything through prayer. Much prayer is done, I do pray and shall ask others to do the same; he assured. With heavenly regards to everybody...."*<sup>40</sup>

The two companions brought over from Padua are precious helpers for the beginning of the school which the Foundress intends to open immediately. But according to the norms already established for novices<sup>41</sup>, she guides them through a course of Spiritual Exercises.

In the Memoirs, it is said:

*"When she returned from Padua with these two companions, she made them follow a course of Spiritual Exercises; then she started with the school, trying to establish a system suitable for a House."*<sup>42</sup>

While Magdalene is working to establish the Institute in Venice according to its true spirit, she is assailed by interior afflictions. She turns with greater insistence to the Lord and obtains as an answer the confirmation of the promise, already received in September, that if she will seek "God alone", the one and only criterion which must direct all the activities of the Institute, she and all the Daughters who shall follow will always be assisted:

*"... she remembers that once, just before leaving for Padua, on a solemn feast dedicated to Our Lady, she found herself greatly troubled and tempted against her vocation. She felt being rebuked and reminded of the promises she had made many times to obtain a vocation that would require imitation of the life of Jesus Christ, even though she had not at all responded to Him. She was touched by the sudden sweetness with which He reprimanded her. she protested to the Lord that she did not want to ask Him anything anymore, not even for companions; henceforth she would do only what she could, not seeking anything but her own sanctification .... She understood, or so it seemed to her, that if she really sought God alone and the most Holy Virgin, in the way the Lord was showing her, which is precisely by suffering willingly, by not looking for comforts, by accepting and loving poverty, by not being preoccupied about people, just as if they did not exist except in relation to God and for what His glory requires, and not seeking their approval either in words or in deeds, then God and the most Holy Mary would assist this soul in her life and not abandon her at her death."*<sup>43</sup>

The above-mentioned anguish is due not only to the foundation Magdalene is carrying out in Venice, but also to the delicate situation in which the companions at the Retreat of St. Joseph in Verona are finding themselves. The separation between the two groups, that is, the Daughters who wanted to follow Leopoldina Naudet for the foundation of another Institution and those who were remaining, was becoming more and more painful.

Even Don Fr. Luigi Trevisani<sup>44</sup>, one of the Veronese priests to whom the Marchioness used to turn for counsel and decisions, was suggesting that she return to Verona and stay there longer.

He writes thus:

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<sup>39</sup> M.d.C. al fratello Bonifacio 24 ottobre 1812. Ep. III/5. pp. 3917-391

<sup>40</sup> Mons. Pacetti a M.d.C., 18 novembre 1812, ms. A2, XXXI, A.C.R.

<sup>41</sup> cf. M.d.C., R.s.s., P. I a, pp. 131-142 and E. Pollonara, *Magdalene of Canossa and the First Formations*, S.G.S., Rome, 1987, p. 9.

<sup>42</sup> M.d.C. . R.s. s., P. I a, p 332

<sup>43</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. I a, pp. 333-334.

<sup>44</sup> Don Luigi Trevisani ( 1741-1821), professor of rhetoric in the Seminary of Verona from 1772-1790. then Dean of Studies till his death.

*"I am very happy that God is using your Ladyship as his instrument to do good in Venice. That you seek nothing except the will of God, as I have always seen to be the aim of your actions, is only right. But that Venice or another place would rob Verona of our Marchioness, this cannot please me and I believe that it does not please the Lord either. The retreat of St. Joseph belongs, and will always belong, to the Marchioness, and all the girls in St. Zeno are daughters of the Marchioness of Canossa. Since God has put in their hearts respect and filial confidence towards their Marchioness, and because God has blessed these mutual holy sentiments with great spiritual and temporal benefit for these same persons and for that entire poor district, I am of the opinion that the field set apart by God for the Marchioness is this parish of St. Zenone .... Only a few months in Verona? It is not good and it does not please the Lord. The retreat of St. Joseph has to be the place where you normally stay ...; then a few months in Venice or somewhere else, where the Lord will call her servant to work for His glory."<sup>45</sup>*

Meanwhile, even the confessor, Don Gaspare Bertoni<sup>46</sup>, is appointed by the Bishop, Innocenzo Liruti,<sup>47</sup> to the very delicate task of being spiritual director of the seminarians, and must be substituted in his responsibility as confessor of the Daughters of Charity by another priest, Don Matteo Farinati<sup>48</sup>. Don Bertoni, however, obtains permission to continue to direct Leopoldina Naudet and her companions. He, in fact, though appreciating Magdalene, was preferring the life-style of L. Naudet, and defining the Institution of the Marchioness as "secular and only active".<sup>49</sup> This judgement is expressed by Bertoni when he does not yet know the spirit which animates Magdalene, and to what interior depth the Lord himself had guided her, especially during her stay in Venice.

The Rule of the Daughters of Charity, by now almost completely drawn up, has such a rich spirituality and originality as to become, in the future, a source from which other founders will draw.

"Hers will be a Religious Institute, but a new one ... They will be true religious, but in a different way, without monastic appearances, without the recitation of the Hours and without enclosure. They are consecrated to God. but in a way suited to their very active mission."<sup>50</sup>

The change of the confessors, however, creates uneasiness and reactions. Don Nicola Galvani senses the possible uneasiness and doubts of Magdalene. He takes the occasion of Carolina's journey to Venice to write to her and to invite her to trust in the Lord:

*"Lady Marchioness, I would like you to impress deeply in your mind and in your heart these three sentences, which are very true in substance. I have extracted them from Scripture for you: He who trusts God, treats God as God, and hence he truly honours him. He who trusts in God, commits God to deal with him as God: and ... what is there that you cannot expect from that abyss of all good? He who nests in God, makes himself, in a certain way, the master of God's heart: hence, at any moment and for any need, he can have the necessary help.*

*With these very short but very true sentences, well impressed in your mind and in your heart, you will be able to dissipate those dark clouds and break those chains with which the ancient serpent tries to stop, or at least to delay, the generous and magnanimous efforts that Our Lord asks of his servants .... Take courage, Marchioness, take courage, and this courage will never be lacking if we trust God and commit him to deal with us as God, and we will become the masters of His heart.*

<sup>45</sup> Don Luigi Trevisani a M.d.C., 4 v. 4 novembre 1812, Ep. II/1, p. 191.

<sup>46</sup> Don Gaspare Bertoni (1777-1853), Founder of the Stigmatines. He was the spiritual guide of Leopoldina Naudet and for some time confessor at the "Canossa Retreat".

<sup>47</sup> Bishop Innocenzo Liruti was born in Villafredda (Friuli) in 1741. He entered the Benedictine order in Padua. He was elected Bishop of Verona in 1807. His work was eminently pastoral and reformative; in this he reestablished and introduced religious congregations. He died in Verona on Aug. 27, 1827.

<sup>48</sup> Don Matteo Farinati substituted Don Gaspare Bertoni as confessor of the Daughters of Charity in Verona.

<sup>49</sup> G. Stofella, *Epistole del Ven. Servo di Dio Don Gaspare Bertoni*, by Stigmatine Fathers, Verona, 1954, Letter 30, p. 83.

<sup>50</sup> M. Giacomini, *Commemorazione ufficiale della Beata Maddalena di Canossa nel 2° centenario della sua nascita*, Venezia, 3 maggio 1975, p. 11.

*I have understood what you have at heart for the Work at St. Joseph' s.. .  
Be calm, for everything is well, because God blesses everything. And if we will trust Him, He will continue to bless everything.  
I do not know how I could suggest putting even the least resistance to the will of the Superiors to make the very good Don Gaspare remain, since the substitute, Farinati, is just as good as Don Gaspare, in every respect..."<sup>51</sup>*

In 1813, Magdalene and her companions of Venice wish to change the residence and move into a monastery.

The monastery, according to Magdalene, is a place where the work can be better established with all its activities, and as a better guarantee for the observance of the Rules.

We read in the Memoirs:

*"For a long time, both she as well as her companions desire to move to another residence and to see the Work transferred to a monastery, for it seemed to this person who is writing that, in such a place, there would be a greater possibility for a real observance ...  
In the meantime, this person has to go again to her first Retreat in Verona, hut for a short while only".<sup>52</sup>*

In spite of the recommendations of Don Luigi Trevisani, Magdalene' stay in Verona was short. She explains the reasons to her brother Bonifacio: the request of the Lord is to establish on solid foundations the House in Venice with all its "Branches", that is with all those activities responding to the charism of the Institute. This is now very clear in the mind and heart of the Foundress:

*"... here, everything is well, thanks to His Mercy, but since we have much to do and I wish to see everything under way, I am delayed in my return ... God willing, ... at the end of this month<sup>53</sup>, since Carolina has to come here ... I wish ro come back with her to see you ala. But for the moment, I will not be able to stay long in Verona I will have to return here after fifteen or twenty days to finish what I have to do. Since the charity of the Lord deigns to use this most miserable instrument to start this Work, His service requires that, in spite of being incapable and undeserving, I do not abandon the work till it is sufficiently established in every branch, a thing which will require some more time..."<sup>54</sup>*

Magdalene, who arrived in Verona at the end of February, is back again in Venice by March 27. After arranging matters in the house of St. Joseph, Magdalene prepares herself to return to Venice, even though she has a premonition that several crosses are waiting for her.

She takes up immediately the transactions to acquire the monastery of St. Lucy.

Of this she informs Carolina:

*"Since I did not have the possibility to write to you before leaving Verona as you wished ... I am doing it now, soon after my return to Venice ... I want to ask you to give me ... an answer about that matter<sup>55</sup> of which I wrote to Marquis Casati<sup>56</sup> ... because very little time is left before the rental of the House where we are<sup>57</sup> expires and if it is possible, I would like to conclude the other business before this date."<sup>58</sup>*

When the transaction seems to take a turn for the worse, Marquis Casati himself goes to Venice. We read in the Memoirs:

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<sup>51</sup> Don Nicola Galvani, a M.d.C., Igl3, Ep. 11/1, p. 193

<sup>52</sup> M d C R.s.s.. p. 1a, pp. 337-338

<sup>53</sup> January 1813

<sup>54</sup> M.d.C. a Bonifacio, 9 gennaio IX13, Ep. 111/5, p. 3921

<sup>55</sup> it refers to the rental for the monastery of St. Lucy.

<sup>56</sup> Marquis Francesco Casati, one of the Friends of the Milanese group who became advisor and benefactor of the Institute.  
(57) At Campo S. Andrea (55) M d.C. alla Durini, 27 marzo. 1813, Ep. 1, pp. 375-376

<sup>57</sup>

<sup>58</sup>



*"Meanwhile this person continued the negotiation to obtain the monastery for living quarters, since the Lord had sent her a new benefactor, unknown to her, but who, of his own desire, had wanted to make acquaintance with her, and later involved himself very much in her Work. "*<sup>59</sup>

About the same matter she writes to Carolina:

*"I had the pleasure to meet the good Marquis Casati here. We spoke about my affairs, for which, as he will tell you, I have all the reasons to hope for the best, just because .... none of us can do anything, and I hope that the Lord, now, doing things alone, will resolve everything".*<sup>60</sup>

While the transactions for the rental of the monastery continues, Magdalene goes to the Church where the body of St. Lucy is venerated, to ask this saint to bless the Work which has the only aim of saving many souls:

*"She placed under the protection of the Saint the Work she desired and hoped could be established here. she pointed out to the Saint that it concerned a community of virgins, whose purpose was to preserve the young girls they assist from moral danger, so that ... she, who had died to safeguard her virginity, would protect this work. From the feelings of trust, the tenderness and interior consolation that followed, she believed that the Saint herself had taken the Work under her protection."*<sup>61</sup>

The political situation becomes ever more threatening. Magdalene prays to obtain the grace to move into the monastery soon. Her prayer is heard. On September 18, 1813, with joy and gratitude, she writes to her brother Bonifacio to inform him that the contract for the rental of St. Lucy had been signed. Soon the Daughters of Charity will move there:

*"The contract for the rental of St. Lucy, thanks to the Lord, was signed yesterday. I hope to be able to move there within two or three weeks ... As regards my coming, which I too desire, I am not sure if it will be in October, since I have to make this change and settle the Schools on both sides, though in the one we are now, they are already well established."*<sup>62</sup>

While she thanks Carolina for sending her some books, she tells her that she is very busy with the moving into the monastery:

*"My dear Carolina, I owe you a thousand thanks for the booklets you sent me, especially for the one on the Holy Crucified Lord. I cannot say how precious it is to me and how grateful I am. I am very busy, because on Saturday<sup>63</sup> I will move to a new place where I hope we will be able to assist many poor girls. Remember that I recommend myself very much to your prayers, so that God may do what you think needs to be done, that is, that He may put in my heart the inspiration of the book (Christ Crucified)."*<sup>64</sup>

In the Memoirs Magdalene confirms when the moving took place:

*"...the move took place on the vigil of the feast of Mary's Divine Motherhood<sup>65</sup>, having purposely chosen a Saturday for this. Her companions were rather unhappy for the change, while she was full of joy to be close to the Blessed Sacrament. "*<sup>66</sup>

After a week, again asking for prayers, she tells Carolina:

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<sup>59</sup> M.d.C. R.s.s., P. Ia, p. 341

<sup>60</sup> M d C. alla Durini. 7 agosto 1813, Ep. 1, p. 382

<sup>61</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. Ia, p. 343.

<sup>62</sup> M.d.C. a Bonifacio Canossa, 18 settembre 1813, Ep. 111/5, pp. 3936-3937

<sup>63</sup> Saturday, Oct. 9, 1813.

<sup>64</sup> M.d.C. alla Durini, 7 ottobre 1813, Ep. 1, pp. 384-385

<sup>65</sup> In that year (1813) the feast of the Motherhood of Mary fell on Oct. 10

<sup>66</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s.. P. 1a, p. 345

*"On Saturday we moved into the new house where, in a few weeks, we will open the School for the girls of Canal Reggio. Truly, for all the work we have to do, we need some more companions. .. Remember to pray for me and ask others to recommend me to the Lord."*<sup>67</sup>

It is November 1813. News about the war arrive from all over; many Venetians leave the city which is almost totally besieged. The French blockade of Venice will last till April 1814 with very serious consequences: difficulties, indigence, famine and hunger, causing the spread of epidemics and death.

Magdalene is at first doubtful whether it is more prudent to return to Verona. After following a suggestion, she decides to remain to glorify the Lord through her service to the poorest, this being the specific vocation of the Institute.

She writes thus in the Memoirs:

*"Meanwhile, even the political situation was becoming very critical. The blockade of the city was imminent ... She was distressed at the thought of having to leave her companions exposed to the situation everyone feared, but also anguished by the fear of excluding herself from the service of God. After many days of uncertainty, she resolved ... to consult the one who was directing her here. She was told to remain and abandon herself to the Lord. This decision left her very consoled, as she seemed disposed to accept any suffering, even death, provided the Lord be glorified and served."*<sup>68</sup>

Just when the military blockade is impending on Venice, Magdalene, preoccupied and anxious for the health of her companions, experiences renewed and more intense signs of communion with God. The "old desires" are rekindled in her.

She writes in her Memoirs:

*"... it seemed to her that the Lord was reassuring her that for all she was to suffer ... He would always be hers, and that one day, she would gain the sweet possession of God. She remained comforted and ready to suffer to the point of even waiting for it ... with joy and calm...  
... other painful things continued to happen to her ... she continued to pray and thank the Lord for the strength to overcome everything ... She felt again encouraged to suffer and even to risk her life for the service of God ... Besides feeling the old desires reawakening within herself and the yearning for the spreading of God's glory and the salvation of souls, she offered herself to go into the whole world, if she could."*<sup>69</sup>

As soon as the political situation permitted it, Magdalene resumed her correspondence with her loved ones and her friend Carolina. She describes to them not only the sad vicissitudes of the time of the blockade, but also and most of all, the marvels done by the Lord and our Lady.

On April 29, 1814, in a letter to her brother, she recounts how Divine Providence solves all her problems and those of the Venetians who, having reached the limits of endurance because of severe privations of all kinds had invoked the Most Holy Virgin who prodigiously answered their plea:

*"Thanks to the Lord ... I fared well throughout this blockade, which, however, caused great anguish for these people.*

*Up till about last month, with money, one could get ... almost ... anything, but lately all kinds of flour were lacking. The poor, lately, were living only on bran. They were relying on fish, but being all the rest lacking, even this became scanty.*

*... The most Holy Mary interceded for this city and for the entire world*

*... their prayers were granted. I am very much consoled that all attribute their liberation to the hands of the one who truly freed them."*<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> M.d.C. alla Durini, 14 Ottobre 1813, Ep.1, p.386

<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> M.d.C. a Bonifacio Canossa. 29 aprile 1814. Ep. 111/5. pp.3947-3948.

On May 17 of the same year, writing to Carolina, she informs her that she lost one of the most valid supporters of her Work, Don Lorenzo Piazza, who died during the blockade, and also that she has not received news from Msgr. Pacetti as yet:

*"You can imagine how much I felt the demise of Don Lorenzo. The Lord wanted to crown his charity promptly. Recommend him to the Lord, even though I believe that he prays for us. The Lord has assisted us so much in this Work that I have nothing else to add... I do not have the news from Canon Pacetti, but I heard that he was in Loreto to preach during Lent. I believe that he did not write to me because after the blockade of Venice, as I did not know where he was, I could never write to him until three days ago. I therefore do not know what he thinks."<sup>71</sup>*

With the fall of Napoleon, the Pope, Pius VII, could also leave the prison of Fontainebleau and return to Rome. During his journey, he stops at Loreto where he has a long meeting with Msgr. Pacetti. In his encounter with the Holy Father the Canon talks to him about Magdalene and, referring to previous information, he asks for further clarifications.

Msgr. Pacetti hastens to give Magdalene news of the encounter:

*"I talked about this Work of Charity. Oh, how satisfied he was with it! He immediately asked whether certain practices which are not suitable for Italy had been omitted. I assured him that in no way did we deviate from what His holiness himself had said on another occasion. He was delighted, approved the Institute and blessed it, promising that, in due time, I would receive the written approval. I spoke to him about the said residence<sup>72</sup>, and he was pleased that it had been taken away<sup>73</sup> from those who had it. Therefore, be at peace also regarding St. Joseph's..."<sup>74</sup>*

After two years of silence, the news about the Pope's interest in her Work communicated by Msgr. Pacetti himself, fills Magdalene's heart with joy. The correspondence with the Canon is re-established. The following month, she receives from him another answer:

*"You may go to Verona; I see that it is necessary but try to be quick... As for St. Joseph's, do all you can and want. Remember that I leave you absolutely free... Try to get some companions and pray much before accepting them. Remember that we need some also for the Holy Father. When he spoke to me about a monastery he said: We could place your Sisters of Charity there. A house is also needed where I have been to preach, as well as in Rome."<sup>75</sup>*

The journey to Verona, which has been postponed several times, will take place because of a death in the family. In July 1814, her uncle Gerolamo, father of Carlino, dies. In that situation, Magdalene experiences one of the many phenomena of clairvoyance found in *the Memoirs*:

*"... when the moment the Lord thought fit to visit this person with a cross, was getting close ... while praying before the Blessed Sacrament, she saw ... suddenly and without previous thought, Jesus Christ Crucified covered with wounds and blood. She did not, at that time, comprehend anything else ... When, however, she was faced with the cross of the Lord sent to her, she understood ... that the uncle, gravely ill ... was already dead, and that the Lord had shown him mercy, and that the little boy (Carlino) for whom she was anxious, would be provided for and helped. A few days after, she received the news of her uncle's Christian death..."<sup>76</sup>*

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<sup>71</sup> M.d.C. alla Durini, 17 maggio 1814, Ep. 1, p. 389

<sup>72</sup> Venice

<sup>73</sup> The monastery of St. Lucy which was in the hands of the State.

<sup>74</sup> Mons. Pacetti a M.d.C. 18 maggio 1814, Ep. II/1, p. 711

<sup>75</sup> Mons. Pacetti, a M.d.C. 14 giugno 1814, Ep. 11/1, p. 196

<sup>76</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. 1a, pp. 35 1-352

In Verona, Magdalene is faced with an added suffering, related to the situation of the Retreat of St. Joseph. The difference of ideas with Leopoldina Naudet still remains strong. The Daughters of Magdalene wish to see the situation settled. Magdalene, though feeling their suffering and the fear at leaving them, because of an interior enlightenment which reassures her about the future, leaves Verona for Venice. She takes two companions with her:

*"Being burdened with many crosses related to her duties, while in her town (Verona), one day, as she was praying, she experienced one of her usual transport of love. From this she draws the strength to overcome every difficulty.*

*Before leaving and feeling grieved at having to depart from her companions, she entrusted all to God. She understood that she would not return soon, but that everything would go on well because God would take care of it. And so indeed it happened. She returned ... with two new companions . . . "*<sup>77</sup>

The companions are: Elena Bernardi and Arcangela Rizzini.<sup>78</sup>

#### .... to the completion of the Rule

Once back in Venice, Magdalene herself confirms that, from October 1814 onwards, she had been:

*"...engaged in writing the Rules of the Institute".*<sup>79</sup>

For sure this was not the first draft, because the Rule, as F. Bonlini testifies, had been written by him, under the dictation of Magdalene herself, during three consecutive months in 1812.

The important and precise clarification relative to the completion of the Rule, is confirmed by a letter of Msgr. Pacetti of July 1814.

*"God wants the Work and that it should develop very much. Complete the Rules and insert the Catechism for the sick. Bring also the others of Verona. If you cannot finish everything by the time I come, do not be upset. Afterwards we will do what is needed. The Holy Father keeps his word. If I tell you that on his own he spoke to me about the Work, asking whether the Sisters were going to visit the sick in their homes, would you not judge that it can be said that this work has been ordained by heaven? However, pray much and let all commit themselves to pray in order to obtain light for the completion of the Rules".*<sup>80</sup>

The Marchioness herself, after five years, writing to her daughter Elena Bernardi remembers:

*"... being always busy to organise those papers that F. Bonlini, you and I have written."*<sup>81</sup>

The Rule, therefore, had been dictated to different persons in the period between 1812 and 1814, under the inspiration of the interior Master who is the Holy Spirit. And it is the Holy Spirit who infuses a specific originality, as testified by Bonlini:

*"She dictated her Rules on the spirit and discipline in such a way that it seemed she was reading from a book a treatise of the purest moral and of the most perfect asceticism, so great was the concentration of her spirit ... ideas ... suggested interiorly by the Spirit of the Lord".*<sup>82</sup>

And in the Memoirs Magdalene states:

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<sup>77</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. Ia, p. 352

<sup>78</sup> cf. G. Stofella, Biografia di Maddalena di Canossa, unedited Work, vol. 2,

<sup>79</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. Ia, p. 359

<sup>80</sup> Mons. Pacetti, a M.d.C. 9 luglio 1814, Ep.11/1, p. 197

<sup>81</sup> M d.C. alla Bemardi, 30 gennaio 1819, Ep. 111/1, p. 242

<sup>82</sup> T. Piccari, op. cit., p. 857.

*"... she wrote everything as it came to her mind, remaining in doubt as to whether the Lord wanted the thing as she had written them or whether they were the result of her thoughts."*<sup>83</sup>

Magdalene, being doubtful, submits what she wrote to Fr. Marino da Cadore, Provincial of the Capuchin Fathers, who was her spiritual director at the time:<sup>84</sup>

*"Regarding this fear, she continued the person who was directing her then, and to whom she had submitted a great part of what she had written. She was assured that it was truly in accordance with the will of the Lord."*<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. I a, p. 359

<sup>84</sup> Fr. Marino da Cadore, in the world Giuseppe Zanetti, was the son of Giovanni Zanetti. He was born in Lozzo di Cadore on January 5, 1745 and died in 1827. In 1761 he entered the Capuchin Convent in Conegliano. Endowed with the strong mind, great wisdom and an ardent love for regular discipline, he had been nominated to various positions in the Order. He worked indefatigably for the re-establishment of the Capuchins in the Venetian region. He was a deep theologian, a religious of very exemplary life, a great sacred preacher, an enlightened director of souls, among whom was Magdalene of Canossa. He had also been the Superior of the Daughters of Charity in Venice.

<sup>85</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. I a, p. 359

## CHAPTER VI TOWARDS PAPAL APPROVAL

### Chapter VI

#### TOWARDS PAPAL APPROVAL

#### Encounters with civil and religious authorities

Between 1814 and the first months of 1815, the events related to the approval of the Institute and of the Rule are interwoven with political events.

The "hundred days" of the Napoleonic return and the occupation of the Papal States on the part of Gioacchino Murat render any contact between Magdalene and Msgr. Pacetti impossible.

Two years later, Magdalene remembers thus:

*"... due to the fatal political situation, I have been unable to maintain a free correspondence with Canon Pacetti..."*<sup>1</sup>

Also, sickness began to upset Msgr. Pacetti's plans. He had desired to go to Venice to help Magdalene in a more concrete way. She, meanwhile, "was directing a flourishing Work, though still limited and without civil, ecclesiastical or juridical state. In order to obtain it, it was necessary to overcome obligatory steps: to deal with the Apostolic See and with the Government make the Work known in the place and have good rapport with the local authorities; in short, as always, it was a question of acquaintances and relationships" <sup>2</sup>

With the return of the Austrians in the Lombard-Venetian region, Magdalene is concerned about retaining the rented premises, and, if possible, to have them gratuitously from the government from whom she wanted the approval of the Institute, to be able to work more freely.

On January 7, 1815, she writes to her brother Bonifacio for advice and help:

*"You already know that I have rented this monastery of St. Lucy, in the hope (always if the Holy Father would be in agreement) of obtaining it gratuitously and permanently from the present Government ... Since the idea of the Holy Father has been reaffirmed to me and knowing, as I have also told you, the desire expressed by him to see the Institution spread, I am urged, not to say compelled, to handle things in such a way as to avoid that the said premises, at the closing of the Congress<sup>3</sup>, be destined for the Religious, since there are many others....*

*I would like therefore, to have your advice on what is best for me to do ... What I would like to have - besides the premises, if it is possible ... is to have the Institution, if not approved as it would be desirable, at least considered favourably ... in order to be able to establish it as the Lord wants it .... and spread it for the glory of God and the good of the poor... since the Lord alone has done everything in this Work, using me just as a figurehead ... The Lord wants you too to contribute as an instrument of his mercy."*<sup>4</sup>

During the first months of 1815, Magdalene had also drafted the "General Plan"<sup>5</sup> of the Institute to be submitted at the right time to the ecclesiastical and civil authorities. She mentions it in a letter to Carolina:

*"I enclose the General Plan of the Institute. Please ask the Archpriest Galvani to read it."*<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> M.d.C. alla Durini, 30 gennaio, 1816, Ep. 1, p. 436.

<sup>2</sup> T. Piccari, op. cit. pp. 1275-276

<sup>3</sup> Congress of Vienna of 1815.

<sup>4</sup> M.d.C., a Bonifacio Canossa, 7 gennaio, 1815, Ep. 1, pp. 553-555.

<sup>5</sup> M.d.C., General Plan of the Institution of the Sisters of Chanty servants of the Poor which started in Venice in 1812, on the first day of August under the patronage of Our Lady of Sorrows, B. 8-8, Ep. 11/2, p. 1422.

<sup>6</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 5 febbraio, 1815, Ep. 1, p. 394.

A favourable occasion for the consolidation of the Work is offered to Magdalene in 1815. The Archduke Giovanni of Austria is expected to arrive in Verona, by May 10, 1815, and be a guest at the Canossa Palace.

Magdalene hopes to have the support of her brother Bonifacio in asking the Prince for exemption from payment of the rent for the two Convents in Verona and Venice. Some human obstacles, entrusted to God in prayer, are overcome, and the encounter takes place.<sup>7</sup> Magdalene confirms it in the "Memo to Count Mellerio:

*"When His Imperial Highness, the Archduke Giovanni, came to Italy, I presented to him the first appeal in Verona, in the house of my brother, who deigned to honour it. I asked him to obtain from His Majesty that I would be relieved from paying the rental of the two premises ... thinking that it was enough to ask to obtain gratuitously these two premises for the Institute of the Daughters of Charity. The Prince, with the usual goodness of the August Family, accepted my plea and committed His Excellency Chamberlain Renier, Venetian nobleman and one of the first promoters of the Institute in Venice, to introduce me on my return there, to His Excellency Count Goess, the new Governor."<sup>8</sup>*

Meanwhile, Pope Pius VII, after the occupation of the Papal States by Murat, leaves Rome and takes refuge in Genoa.

Magdalene thinks of the possibility of a meeting with him, since she cannot discuss the affair with her Director Msgr. Pacetti who is sick and far away.

She writes to Carolina that she will go to Milan to travel with her to Genoa; there they will meet Fr. Fontana<sup>9</sup> and ask him to review the Rule before presenting it to the Holy Father.

In January 1816, Magdalene describes the event in the "detailed report" addressed to the same Milanese friend:

*"... I came to Milan last May to travel with you to Genoa with the hope that through you, the most Rev. Fr. Fontana would, in his charity, review the Rules and obtain an encounter with the Holy Father... Since this journey could not take place, due to his sudden departure from Genoa, I had to be contented to put myself with you at his feet, when he went to Piacenza. In those brief moments I was able to tell him that I was Magdalene of Canossa, the Daughter of Charity of whom Canon Pacetti had spoken to His Holiness. In his kindness, he immediately answered me. "If you wish to have the formal approval, when I will be back in Rome, send it" and for the great confusion and agitation in which I was, I did not understand anything more. I added however: Your Holiness, I wrote the Rules on the order of His Lordship the Canon; does your Holiness command that I send them to the Canon to be corrected and presented to you? When he heard me speaking of the Rules he answered: "Send them to Rome, send them to Rome and we shall see..."<sup>10</sup>*

Thus Magdalene continues in her Memoirs:

*"... she returned to Verona, where she found as many crosses as she wanted, or better to say, she found many crosses regarding the temporal matters she had to transact on behalf of some companions of that first retreat, many of whom she could no longer pacify to be so divided, not only because of her absence, but furthermore because they lacked a Superior of their own Institute. God, however, gave her the grace to succeed in calming them, insisting on the exercise of virtues and making them understand*

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<sup>7</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. 1, pp. 360-361.

<sup>8</sup> M.d.C., Pro-memoria al Conet Mellerio, 25 marzo, 1818, Ep. 11/1, p. 106.

<sup>9</sup> It is Francesco Luigi Fontana a Bamabite Father, born in Casalmaggiore (Cremona) in 1750. He taught Greek and Latin Literature in the Colleges of Bologna and Milan. In 1747 he was elected Provincial of the Order in Lombardy. In 1801 Card. Gerdil called him to Rome as Consultant for the Oriental Rites. In 1804 he accompanied, in his capacity as theologian, Pius VII to Paris for the crowning of Napoleon. In 1807 he became General of his Order. Since he cooperated in the drafting of the Excommunication Bull against the Emperor, he became a prisoner in Vincennes from Jan. 1811 till April 1814. Then he returned to Rome where he became Cardinal in 1816 and died in 1822 (cf. C. Testore, in Encicl. Catt., V, p. 1495, col. I).

<sup>10</sup> M.d.C., alla Dunni, 30 gennaio, 1816, Ep. 1, pp. 436-437

*that the good of the Institute was demanding it, consoling them also with the assurance that the separation would not be for long. Having transacted all the business here and accepted two companions, one for Verona in due time, and the other for Milan ... she returned to Venice more interiorly recollected. It seemed to her that this time, the stay in Verona left her with these feelings. During the time she stayed there, sometimes during prayer, the Lord encouraged her with the usual thoughts of Paradise."<sup>11</sup>*

Magdalene returns to Venice in the middle of July and continues the transactions for the two monasteries.

At the end of September, she notifies Msgr. Pacetti that the Governor of Venice has shown his satisfaction for her activity and that of her companions.

The Canon answers her in return:

*"I am in bed due to an inflammation of the throat, called "angina", with fever and everything else ... The news that this Governor has expressed his full satisfaction, brought me such indescribable consolation. Do not think of anything else but of working, since in the end everything will turn out well..."<sup>12</sup>*

The concern for the direction of the Work is for Magdalene a consequence of the commitment she took in Piacenza during the meeting with the Holy Father.

Meanwhile, in September of the same year, she sends the Rule to be reviewed, to Msgr. Pacetti.

The Canon answers by return of post:

*"I am reviewing your Papers<sup>13</sup>. I find only two very small things. I leave them as they are because I am inclined to think that the Lord wants them that way, and he will make known what he wants through the one who takes his place"<sup>14</sup>*

And again after a few days:

*"I have finished reviewing the Papers. They are very good, with the exception of the two very small things I already mentioned, but which I am inclined to leave as they are in order to know the Will of God better. About the prudence used for every article, as well as that for the method to be observed, I was delighted that nothing had been omitted."<sup>15</sup>*

On November 15, there is the unexpected visit of Emperor Francesco I to the monastery of St. Lucy in Venice.

After the encounter with the Sovereign, Magdalene writes thus to Carolina:

*"Your sisters<sup>16</sup> might have already given you a detailed description of the visit made by the august Sovereign to this monastery ... I only add, in case you have not received her letter yet, ... that he, besides giving me the premises, also took the Institute under his protection, consenting, with pleasure, that I may spread it as much as I wish, and encouraging me to have everyone dressed uniformly. You can imagine how glad I am seeing that he deigns to accept this little token of the homage we give him and which even more now we will openly give serving the poor who are the object of his threat love and compassion".<sup>17</sup>*

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<sup>11</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. Ia, p.363.

<sup>12</sup> Mons. Pacetti, a M.d.C., 3 settembre, 1815, ms., A2, XXXI, A.C.R.

<sup>13</sup> Mons. Pacetti calls the Rule "Papers".

<sup>14</sup> Mons. Pacetti, a Maddalena, 21 settembre, 1815, ms., A2, XXXI, A.C.R.

<sup>15</sup> Mons. Pacetti, a Maddalena, 1 ottobre, 1815, ms., A2, XXXI, A.C.R.

<sup>16</sup> It is Paola Trotti, married Taverna, the sister of Carolina Durini, who is in Venice.

<sup>17</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, novembre 1815. Ep. 1. p. 422.



Magdalene also gives the report of the Emperor's visit to Msgr. Pacetti, who in turn responds as follows:

*"The Holy Father approved the Institute and His Majesty has applauded it therefore there is no hindrance for all that is for the greater glory of God ... I shall send the Papers when you send me your letter for Fr. Fontana. These are not an obstacle for our plans. The Institute has the approval and the Rules will have it as well".<sup>18</sup>*

### **Towards the approval**

The verbal approval of the Institute, obtained by Msgr. Pacetti in his encounter with Pope Pius VII in Loreto and the invitation of the same Pontiff to Magdalene<sup>19</sup> to send to Rome the Rule for approval, are two milestones for the final recognition of the Institution.

But two long years will pass before the Rule arrives in the hands of the Pope.

In fact, before reaching Cardinal Fontana<sup>20</sup> who took upon himself to submit it to the Pontiff, the Rule went through several hands.

In order to shorten the time Magdalene solicits her friend Durini to be the mediator for the "said affair":

*"I would like an act of charity ... that is that you write to Fr. Fontana about the said affair and tell him that through a Dominican Religious he will receive ... the Papers which were the cause of my great anxiety in Piacenza . He should read them out of love for the Lord and speak about them to His Holiness. You already know what the Holy Father has promised me about the formal approval."<sup>21</sup>*

About two weeks later, she again puts pressure with a letter to ask for another important favour:

*"Another act of charity ... you should obtain for me from the vezy Rev. Fr. Fontana and that is that he himself receive the hook of the Rules which I with all my heart submit to the will of the Holy Father and ... I would prefer that it should not go through the Congregation of Bishops ... but should remain only in his hands. If the Lord will inspire the Holy Father to approve it together with the Institute I would like that everything remains between the Holy Father and him..."<sup>22</sup>*

Meanwhile, after more than three years, Magdalene is able to meet Msgr. Pacetti, who has finally returned to Venice after a long, forced sojourn in the Marches. Such a meeting enables Magdalene to know in whose hands the Rule is, and Msgr. Pacetti, on his part, can personally take up once again the task of obtaining the long-awaited approval.

Magdalene speaks to her friend about his personal interests:

*"...I am here again to trouble you regarding the Papers ... having been able to speak personally with the one who is directing me ... I ask you again the favour to drop a line to the said Cardinal, to whom Msgr. Sinibaldi<sup>23</sup>, President of the Ecclesiastical Academy, will present the Papers .... The Rev. Canon Pacetti will take upon himself to write a few lines to the said Cardinal, simply to say a few words about the same Papers, I believe, to tell him about what he has agreed with the Holy Father about them ... Besides, please recommend to the Cardinal to keep the thing ... possibly secret .... I believe that silence is safer..."<sup>24</sup>*

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<sup>18</sup> Mons. Pacetti. a Maddalena. 15 dicembre. 1815, Ep. II/1. p. 149

<sup>19</sup> At Piacenza.

<sup>20</sup> Fr. Fontana is made Cardinal in the first months of 1816.

<sup>21</sup> M.d.C., alla Dunni. 12 gennaio. 1816, Ep. 1, p. 429.

<sup>22</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 30 gennaio, 1816, Ep. 1, p. 439.

<sup>23</sup> Cardinal Sinibaldi Giovanni Giacomo, Born in Rome in 1773 and consecrated priest in 1796. In 1821 he was Vice Mayor of the city of Rome, where he was consecrated Bishop in 1822.

<sup>24</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 29 aprile, 1816, Ep. 1, pp. 445-446.

The numerous and cordial contacts of Msgr. Pacetti with Pius VII, led him to take the final step of submitting, through Cardinal Fontana, the Rule of Magdalene of Canossa with his personal message.

Thus the Canon turned with humility and courage to the renowned Cardinal:

*"Very Reverend Eminence,*

*Though I do not have the honour of being acquainted with your Very Reverend Eminence, I take courage to turn with great humility to you because of the interest you deigned to take in this Work of the Daughters of Charity of which I am part, and also because I am sure that the distinguished noble Lady Countess Durini, who is very good to me, will recommend me to you.*

*Through Msgr. Sinibaldi, a relative of mine, Your Eminence will receive the Rules of the Daughters of Charity. These do not differ from what His Holiness has been indicating to me in two Conferences on the same, that I had with him in the past years. I took care that the Marchioness herself would write them following the directives I received. Both of us, however, will be very happy that anything which is not pleasing be cancelled, since we are most happy that the Lord be glorified in the way pleasing the Holy Father, which we recognize as the will of God. I am reminding His Holiness of it with my very humble letter, that I plead Your Eminence to deliver into His Beatitude's hands."<sup>25</sup>*

*Your Eminence will allow me to ask that, in such an encounter, every precaution to keep the approval of these Rules secret, be taken. The present way of thinking could somewhat compromise the Work".<sup>26</sup>*

The letter that Msgr. Pacetti encloses, to be transmitted to Pius VII, is thus formulated:

*"Holy Father,*

*His Eminence Card. Fontana will present to you the Rules of the Daughters of Charity, which have already been approved here, as Your Holiness deigned to order me in Loreto as well as the Marchioness in Piacenza. With them we seek nothing but the greater glory of God and to conform ourselves to the will of your Holiness. We are also ready to discontinue the Work if you so command. Moreover you will see that everything is according to what your Beatitude deigned to prescribe to me. We not only recognize, but adore the will of God in your will. On the occasion of the visit to this city, His Majesty the Emperor came to see our Work. He donated to us the locality where we are and another in Verona. He expressed his full satisfaction, and said to Magdalene of Canossa: "I wish, with my whole heart and soul that this Work may be established because of the great good that is done." The Empress urged her to establish a similar one in Milan. The Emperor himself renewed the solicitation, adding that he eagerly desired to have such Works in every part of his States. Meanwhile in Milan, everything has been prepared and I hope that in July there will be the opening of the house with the required number of Sisters."<sup>27</sup>*

The forwarding of the Rule and the attached letter to the Holy See made by Card. Fontana is acknowledged with words of praise, but with understandable reservations, due to the prudence with which the Church proceeds for such approvals.

Card. Fontana, dealing with Msgr. Masio, Secretary of His Holiness, expresses himself in this way:

*"In all this, there is nothing that is not praise worthy, highly praiseworthy, and in accordance with the Gospel and the norms of most sound piety and devotion.*

*However, in regard to the Rules in particular, there are too many things to be examined in detail. As you know, the Holy See wants to proceed in the examination of them with great circumspection and very slowly, and besides that even through the Sacred Congregation, instituted specially for such matters."<sup>28</sup>*

### **The special indebtedness**

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<sup>25</sup> The expression with which Pacetti pleads with Cardinal Fontana to deliver his message in the hands of the Holy Father proves its contemporaneity with that addressed to the Pontiff Pius VII.

<sup>26</sup> Mons. Pacetti, al Card. Fontana (cf. M.d.C., ep 11/1 pp. 714-715).

<sup>27</sup> Mons. Pacetti, alla Sua Santità Pio VII, I maggio, 1816. (cf. M.d.C., Ep. I. p.713).

<sup>28</sup> Card. Fontana a Mons. Masio. 6 novembre, 1816, in M.d.C., Ep. II/1, p.717

## towards Countess Durini

Magdalene, after her encounter with Pius VII and the forwarding of the Rule to Rome, must wait a long time for an answer.

Many are the people who help her, in particular Countess Durini, who has influence on Card. Fontana and Msgr. Pacetti who attaches to the Rule a letter for Pius VII.<sup>29</sup>

Canon Pacetti, besides, pleads with Card. Fontana to let Magdalene know "something" about the results through Countess Durini.<sup>30</sup>

Meanwhile Carolina insists with Magdalene to decide for a foundation in Milan.

She had already made numerous and pressing requests in the past, but for good reasons Magdalene had postponed it many times.

Only in July 1816, she believes that the favourable time has come for the opening of the first house in Milan. She places this foundation in the hands of Mary most Holy.

She tells Carolina Durini:

*"God willing, I hope to come to Milan on Tuesday<sup>31</sup> with three companions, of whom you know only Elena. I will stop one night at ... and another at Caravaggio, so that in the morning I may visit Our Lady and recommend to her the matter you already know and for which I am undertaking this journey."<sup>32</sup>*

Another concern regarding the house of St. Joseph forces Magdalene to return to Verona. Leopoldina Naudet together with her companions is ready to leave the Retreat where Magdalene had received her, and move to the monastery of the Theresians to start her own Institute which she will name "Sisters of the Holy Family".

Magdalene gives the news to Elena Bernardi in these words:

*"Today Lady Leopoldina, with the last companions I had here, has moved to the new house. You may imagine how much worried I will be now."<sup>33</sup>*

With the departure of Leopoldina, it becomes urgent to find one to substitute her in the role of Superior of the house of Verona.

To C. Durini who solicits her to go back to Milan, Magdalene answers, saying that her return depends on the solution of the serious problem:

*"Do not be afraid that I may forget Milan. I may need to do this some times, since I have it too much at heart. Pray that the Lord will give me a Superior for Verona, of whom I am much in need. This is the only way to speed my return."<sup>34</sup>*

Her friend, meanwhile, takes pain to give her news about the results of the Rule that is in the hands of the revisers of the Roman Curia.

She writes to her that some of them did not judge it favourably.

Magdalene is not surprised, and answers:

*"I am not surprised that they found some things wrong, rather I am much surprised about those found good. I confess that I was considering it prodigious having been told that the Papers<sup>35</sup> were alright. I wrote the little that came to my mind, with the limited experience of the few years I have been in this*

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<sup>29</sup> cf. note no. 27

<sup>30</sup> cf. Mons. Pacetti, al Card. Fontana in M.d.C., Ep.II/1, p. 715.

<sup>31</sup> It is July 17, 1816.

<sup>32</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 11 luglio, 1816, Ep. 1, p. 452.

<sup>33</sup> M.d.C., alla Bernardi, 9 novembre, 1816, Ep. 111/1, p. 23.

<sup>34</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 12 novembre, 1816, Ep. 1, p.456.

<sup>35</sup> "Papers" in place of Rules.

*vocation, without ability and knowledge, but also without peace, sending everything afterwards to the person you know, to be reviewed and corrected. This person judged best not to add even a comma, rather he wanted to leave even the spelling mistakes made by the one who transcribed them".<sup>36</sup>*

Magdalene repeats what she has expressed in the Memoirs: "I wrote the little that came to my mind" and besides, she speaks of a "transcription".

The text sent to Rome is therefore a copy of the original. This is confirmed by a letter addressed to Elena Bernardi:

*"Remember to continue to pray to Many for me and for those Papers you copied. Let us make a novena to Our Lady of Good Counsel."<sup>37</sup>*

### **The approval of the Institute**

*"The Institute belongs ... to Our Lady"<sup>38</sup>*

Magdalene will write many times to her daughters. She was personally convinced of it and wanted all the members of the Institute to be too. Facts often show it. Even the Papal Brief of Pius VII is signed on the eve of a feast of Our Lady, precisely that of the Presentation of Mary to the Temple, very dear to the heart of the Foundress.

Magdalene receives it only in the month of December, and once again she can testify that:

*"... the Queen of Mercy sends us joys always on her feasts"<sup>39</sup>*

The Papal Brief, dated Nov. 20, 1816, while praising the Institute of the Daughters of Charity and its Foundress Magdalene of Canossa, leaves the "solemn apostolic approval" of the Rule to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars.

Pius VII writes thus to Msgr. Pacetti:

*"Beloved Son, my Apostolic blessing. Our beloved son, Francesco Fontana, Card. Priest of the Holy Roman Church, has presented to us the Rules and Constitutions of the so called Sisters of Charity. After much consideration, we have decided to praise the heroic piety of that Institute, which resolved to imitate our very patient Saviour Jesus Christ and his Sorrowful Mother. We understood how that Institute, with all its members, wants to embrace great perfection by fulfilling those two very vast precepts in which the whole law and the prophetic oracles reside. Therefore we do not know what else we could add, but to express to you, with our appreciation, how commendable that very beautiful intention, those holy endeavors of yours are, and how great is the devotion which you have for the Institute of the Marchioness of Canossa. As for those Rules, since they need a solemn apostolic approval, it is necessary that they be diligently considered and examined, one by one, with great attention, as this Holy See usually does. This task is the Competent one of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, specially established for this purpose.*

*Meanwhile, as it is OUR most sacred duty, we do not cease to urge you and that pious Lady not to slow down in the least in your worthy plan, rather, all the more, that you keep very firm your spirit of such rare piety. Meanwhile with fatherly love and sincere affection, we impart to you our Apostolic Blessings Given in Rome, at St. Mary Major on Nov 1816, XVIth of Our Pontificate."<sup>40</sup>*

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<sup>36</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 19 novembre, 1816, Ep. 1, p. 458.

<sup>37</sup> M.d.C., alla Bernardi, 20 novembre, 1816, Ep. 111/1, p. 29.

<sup>38</sup> M.d.C., alla Polli, 18 maggio, 1833, Ep. 111/5, p. 3363.

<sup>39</sup> M.d.C., alla Bernardi, 3 aprile, 1819, Ep. 111/1, p. 271.

<sup>40</sup> Pio VII, Breve di lode, a Mons. Pacetti, 20 novembre. 1816, ms. orig., A2 A.C.R.

CHAPTER VII  
AFTER THE DECREE OF  
SPALATRO

**Chapter VII**

"AFTER THE DECREE OF SPALATRO

**Magdalene and the Patriarch  
of Venice**

At the beginning of January 1817, Magdalene is called to Venice by the Patriarch, Francesco Maria Milesi.<sup>1</sup>

She informs her friend Carolina of this:

*" I believe that I will have to go very soon to Venice, where I am called by the Patriarch. You may also imagine how much this makes me uneasy..."<sup>2</sup>*

After a few days, she communicates to her a synthesis of the encounter:

*"On Saturday I arrived safely in Venice ... and I met the Patriarch. To say it all in one word, I hope for much good, through the intercession of the Holy Mary."<sup>3</sup>*

The matter that worries Magdalene at this time is the formal approval of the Institute.

While waiting for it, she goes from one city to another, according to the greatest needs, without minding her tiredness.

Meanwhile, on May 17, 1818, the "Decree of Spalatro", which declares the re-establishment of many of the Orders suppressed by Napoleon, is proclaimed. Countess Taverna, sister of Carolina Durini, comes to know that the Institute of the Daughters of Charity is listed among those considered useful to humanity, and gives the news to Magdalene.

The happy news and the consequent decision to prolong her stay in Venice reaches Carolina in these terms:

*"A Decree<sup>4</sup> has arrived here<sup>5</sup>, of which I have been informed this morning by your sister who ... inquired also about us.*

*This Decree concerns or orders the re-establishment of the Religious Orders and commands the Ecclesiastical Superiors to indicate those more useful to humanity ... Your sister asked if, because of it, they intended to take away from me the Monastery of St. Lucy. They said no, but rather that we were*

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<sup>1</sup> Francesco Maria Milesi (Patriarch from 1815 to 1819). Born in Venice in 1774, he spent his whole life in this city with the exception of nine years, from 1807 to 1815, when he was Bishop of Vigevano. In Dec. 1815 the Emperor of Austria, Francis I, proposed him as Patriarch of Venice and Pius VII nominated him in the Consistory of Sept. 23, 1816. He died in Venice on Sept. 18, 1819.

<sup>2</sup> M.d.C., alla Duni, p. 1, p. 467.

<sup>3</sup> M.d.C., alla Duni, 15 gennaio. 1817.

<sup>4</sup> It is the Decree of Spalatro.

<sup>5</sup> In Venice.

*contemplated in the Decree. To tell the truth, it seems to me that, for the good of the whole Institute, this is not the right time to leave Venice...<sup>6</sup>*

The same decision is afterwards communicated also to Elena Bernardi:

*"We are now at a time, when for the good of the Institute, I think it necessary for me to remain here a while longer. Since the Decree for the re-establishment of the Religious Orders has arrived, I would like to see what turn these things are taking and whether, in this occasion they will recognize us as Daughters of Charity..."<sup>7</sup>*

In August 1818, Magdalene goes to Milan and takes such an opportunity to present to Msgr. Carlo Gaetano Gaysruck,<sup>8</sup> Archbishop of Milan, the Plan of the Institute, the same as that given to the Patriarch of Venice and to the Bishop of Verona.

While in Milan, she writes a letter to her Veronese Counsellor, Don Luigi Trevisani, giving him details about what she has done:

*"Finally, here I am to tell... about the development and state of our affairs... As soon as I arrived in Milan I went to pay my respects to the Archbishop, who received me with the greatest kindness. I presented to him the Plan, similar to that given to the Patriarch,<sup>9</sup> and the one I read to our Bishop...<sup>10</sup>, I asked him to say, if he so wishes, when he presents the general Plan for the re-establishment of the Religious Orders, that he has found a newly established house of the Daughters of Charity in Milan, similar to the ones in Venice and Verona. He accepted the Paper saying that he wanted to study it, assuring me that he would do everything in his power."<sup>11</sup>*

Meanwhile, the Patriarch of Venice and the Bishop of Verona, on the basis of the Decree of Spalatro of May 17, 1818, send a report to the Government soliciting it to give the formal approval to the Institute of the Daughters of Charity.

Msgr. Milesi, Patriarch of Venice, writes thus to the Imperial Government:

*"With the constant concern to fulfil the Decree of Spalatro ... I wish to propose the project of the Daughters of Charity which is for the training of poor abandoned girls, and also of women of the lower class. If there is an Institution which interests my pastoral zeal, merits special consideration and perfectly agrees with the wise aims ... of our beloved Sovereign .... it is that of the Daughters of Charity... ... since ... three houses have already been started by the Marchioness, Magdalene of Canossa, here in Venice and Verona, the fortunate native place of the Foundress, and in Milan, which have already been accepted and praised but not yet fully established ... The very zealous Pastors of the above mentioned cities, the Archbishop of Milan and the Bishop of Verona, deeply convinced of the usefulness of such an Institute, agree with me and are anxiously waiting to see it stably consolidated by the clement Sovereign approval."<sup>12</sup>*

The Bishop of Verona, Msgr. Liruti, makes the same plea to the Government:

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<sup>6</sup> M.d.C., alla Dunni, 26 giugno, 1818, Ep. 1, p. 499.

<sup>7</sup> M.d.C., alla Bernardi, 3 luglio, 1818, Ep. III/1, p. 179.

<sup>8</sup> Card. Karl Gaetan Gaysruck (1769- 1846) of German origin was born in Cannzia. He was Bishop of Derbe. Francis I aver entrusting to him the Diocese of Linz, nominated him Archbishop of Milan in 1816. He was made Cardinal by Leo XII in 1824.

<sup>9</sup> it is Msgr. F. M. Milesi.

<sup>10</sup> it is the Bishop of Verona, Msgr. I. Liruti.

<sup>11</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Mons. Milesi, Patriarca di Venezia, all'I.R. Governo, 10 settembre, 1818, Ep. 11/1, p. 2 10. (13) Mons. Liruti, Vescovo di Verona, all'I.R. Governo, 3 ottobre, 1818, Ep. II/1 p. 213. it is the Decree of Spalatro of May 17, 1817.

*"It would be for me of great consolation, and of utmost usefulness for my Diocese, if this Great Imperial General Government would be concerned to take the matter up ... with the sovereign authority of His Imperial Majesty ... so that such a beneficial Institute, consecrated to the spiritual and temporal good of the female sex, especially the poor, which has been already praised verbally by His Majesty, will not remain private, but be approved and given a public perpetual stability by a sovereign decree."<sup>13</sup>*

Magdalene is constantly travelling for the pressing interests of the Institute. During one of her sojourns in Verona she gives to her friend a synthesis of the work she is doing to obtain the decree of approval of the Institute from the Government

*"...my dear friend, I want to bring you up-to-date about the state of our affairs .... Being in Venice at the time the Sovereign Decree<sup>14</sup> for the re-establishment of Religious Orders was proclaimed, I pleaded with the Patriarch to list among the Institutes to be reestablished if he so judges, that of the Daughters of Charity. In his goodness he agreed with my wish, and so did the Bishop of Verona, both applying for it to the General Government with a special petition ... The Archbishop of Milan, as you know, accepted my plea with the same kindness. But being the house of Milan in its beginnings and not our property, he wanted it in writing. All the three Prelates also wanted a Plan of the Institute which I gave them; the same to all, of course."<sup>15</sup>*

Magdalene, when called again to Venice by Patriarch Milesi, realizes that the book of the Rules is missing and makes a prompt request for it to E. Bernardi:

*"To my great disappointment, when unpacking the trunk, I saw that you had forgotten to put in the other book of the Rules that is partly written on light green cards. You know well how much I need it at this time; therefore, very promptly, ask Mr. Battista Cogliati<sup>16</sup> to send it to me, together with all the papers that are in the same book, with all due precautions by stage-coach ... but do it right away, so that I may receive it before I leave for Venice ... where I am wanted for the Constitutions, as the Patriarch says. you may imagine the great need I have of prayers."<sup>17</sup>*

Magdalene arrives in Venice on Oct. 31, 1818 and at the beginning of November she writes to Angela Bragato:

*"Our transactions go well, but to me, it seems that there is not too much of a hurry. Today, or rather just now, I have finished the papers which kept me busy throughout all these days. I have to present them to the Patriarch..."<sup>18</sup>*

Perhaps the person more interested to receive news about the Rules, which had to be presented to Msgr. Milesi, is Bernardi who helped with them from the first draft. So, Magdalene informs her:

*"I have finished the Rules, but our Patriarch, in his charity and goodness, does not want me to go to bring them, nor to send them to him. Since he wants this, I do not know what to tell you till he comes".<sup>19</sup>*

During those days, not having found in Venice a secretary available for the transcription of the Rules, she used the help of Teresa Spasciani, one of her daughters.

Sorry for having burdened her with overwork, she tells E. Bernardi:

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<sup>15</sup> M.d.C., alla Contessa Somaglia, 14 ottobre, 1818, Ep. 1, pp. 614-615.

<sup>16</sup> Mr. Battista Cogliati is the officer of postal service.

<sup>17</sup> M.d.C., alla Bernardi, 17 ottobre, 1818, Ep. 111/1, pp. 184-185.

<sup>18</sup> M.d.C., alla Bragato, 1818 novembre, Ep. 111/1, p. 191.

<sup>19</sup> M.d.C., alla Bernardi, 17 novembre, 1818, Ep. III/1 p. 195.

*"I am killing Teresa<sup>20</sup>, making her write the whole day; it is enough to say that, also for the Papers I sent to the Patriarch, I could not find a secretary, not even paying for one, so we had to do it all by ourselves."<sup>21</sup>*

Unfortunately, the Patriarch, being more and more engaged in urgent matters, cannot keep his promise to go personally to the monastery of St. Lucy. He therefore asks Magdalene to send the Rules to him.

She does it through Giuseppe Alessandri<sup>22</sup>, one of the Procurators of Venice, who has a very active role in the affairs of the Institute, especially in Venice.

Thus she writes to E. Bernardi:

*"The Patriarch could not grant me the honour of his visit, therefore, with his usual goodness and charity, he asked for the Papers which I gave the day before yesterday to the kind Mr. Alessandri I shall write to you when I know the results."<sup>23</sup>*

### **Private audience with the Emperor of Austria**

On February 23, 1819, the Emperor Francis I is in Venice. He grants a private audience to Magdalene. The results of such an encounter are immediately made known to the Sisters in Milan and Verona. Magdalene writes thus to Milan:

*"My dear daughter ... yesterday afternoon His Majesty deigned to grant me a private audience ... He told me that he saw our Plan and had found it very beautiful, and that, three days ago, he had signed our Papers, in order not to send them to Vienna. " <sup>24</sup>*

And on the same day to Verona:

*"Yesterday I had a private audience with His Majesty ... He told me that three days ago he had signed our Papers, and that he had seen our Plan and found it very beautiful."<sup>25</sup>*

Three days later, she writes again to A. Bragato:

*"The Sovereign left this morning. Tomorrow is Sunday, but on Monday I start soliciting at break-neck speed, since I want to finish all the things here, and come, when it pleases the Lord, to Verona and do the same."<sup>26</sup>*

More than a month will pass from the encounter with the Emperor till the time when the longed-for Decree for the approval reaches Venice.

Only on April 3, Magdalene will be able to communicate the great and longed-for event:

*"This morning I went to our esteemed Governor...<sup>27</sup> He told me that yesterday he had received the signed formal approval of the Institute of the Daughters of Charity. You may imagine our joy. I visited our beloved Archbishop who was as happy as we were. He will speedily settle everything"<sup>28</sup>*

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<sup>20</sup> Teresa Spasciani (1773-1843). She was admitted among the aspirants in Verona, and afterwards sent by the Foundress to Milan as the fourth Sister in that foundation. At the end of 1818, she is in Venice as Superior.

<sup>21</sup> M.d.C., alla Bemardi, 8 dicembre, 1818, Ep. 111/1, p. 210.

<sup>22</sup> For biographical notes cf. M.d.C., Ep. I, p. 380.

<sup>23</sup> M.d.C., alla Bemardi, 28 novembre, 181X, Ep. 111/1, pp. 200-201

<sup>24</sup> M.d.C., alla Bemardi, 24 febbraio, 1819, Ep. 111/1, pp. 249-250.

<sup>25</sup> M.d.C., alla Bragato, 24 febbraio, 1819, Ep. 111/1, p. 252.

<sup>26</sup> M.d.C., alla Bragato, 27 febbraio, 1819, Ep. III/1 p. 255.

<sup>27</sup> It is Count Goess, Governor of the Province of Venice.

<sup>28</sup> M.d.C., alla Bemardi, 3 aprile, 1819, Ep. III/1. Dp 271



Letters follow in succession, and Magdalene attributes such flattering recognitions to the Mother of God:

*"... Our most Holy Mother wanted to show us her mercy by disposing that the signed formal approval of the Institute of the Daughters of Charity would arrive here yesterday, as our esteemed Governor told me this morning. "*<sup>29</sup>

### **Ecclesial recognition for Venice and Verona**

On May 29, 1819, Magdalene has the joy also to receive the approval of the Rules from Msgr. Milesi, the Patriarch.

In the Decree of the Patriarch it is said:

*"Prompted by the light of the Holy Spirit, we came to the decision to approve and confirm the Constitutions, as we by our present Decree grant and confirm them, recommending their total execution and observance."*<sup>30</sup>

The Marchioness communicates the joyous event to Don Luigi Trevisani:

*"... yesterday I received from our Prelate<sup>31</sup> the Decree of formal approval of the Rules which I had submitted to him. He also returned to me the two manuscripts, the one containing the rules, regulations, and what concerns the vows, the interior government of the house, the union of our Houses, the election of the Superior, the reception of novices, and the other, about the five Branches of Charity embraced by the Institute. The Patriarch signed both, page by page."*<sup>32</sup>

Two days later, the procurator, Giuseppe Alessandri, writes to the Marchioness informing her that the Patriarch has fixed June 8 as the date for the canonical erection of the House of Venice:

*"The date of the erection of the Institute remains fixed for Tuesday..."*<sup>33</sup>

Magdalene gives the news to Don Trevisani:

*"... on Tuesday, God willing, the canonical erection will take place in a devout form, but without much noise or invitations."*<sup>34</sup>

After the ceremony, the Foundress, full of gratitude for the extraordinary help from the Blessed Virgin, writes to E. Bernardi:

*"Do me the favour to ... tell the Parish Priest<sup>35</sup> that, on Tuesday in this Church of St. Lucy, the Canonical Erection of the Institute in this city took place through the powerful intercession of Our Lady."*<sup>36</sup>

Fifteen days later, even the Government Decree for the House of Verona arrives. The Bishop of Verona, Innocenzo Liruti, thanking the General Imperial Government of Venice for the transmittal of the "Sovereign

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<sup>29</sup> M.d.C., alla Bragato, 3 aprile, 1819, Ep. 111/1, p. 272.

<sup>30</sup> Mons. Milesi, Patnarca di Venezia a M.d.C., 29 maggio, 1819, Ep. II/1, p. 224.

<sup>31</sup> it is the Patriarch, Msgr. Milesi.

<sup>32</sup> M.d.C., a Don L. Trevisani, 2 giugno, IX19, Ep. 11/1, p. 134. (

<sup>33</sup> G. Alessandri, to M.d.C., June 4, 1819, Ep. 11/1, p. 225.

<sup>34</sup> M.d.C., to Fr. L. Trevisani, June 5, 1819, Ep. 11/1, p. 139.

<sup>35</sup> It is Msgr. Francesco Maria Zoppi, Parish Priest of St. Stephen in Milan. Msgr. Zoppi (1765-1841) had a degree in theology from the University of Pavia. He was an oblate priest and the Rector of the Seminary from 1799 to 1803, and for fifteen years the Parish Priest of St. Stephen in Milan. During this period, precisely in 1816, he gave hospitality in his rectory to the first Daughters of Charity. In 1823 he was consecrated Bishop of Massa Carrara.

<sup>36</sup> M.d.C. alla Bernardi, 12 giugno, 1819, Ep. III/1, p. 308

Determination" that approves the Institute of the Daughters of Charity, communicates also the date fixed by him for the canonical erection:

*"... I fixed next Saturday, 26th day of this month, as the date for the erection of the Institute of the Sisters of Charity, approved by His Majesty .... for this city in the assigned locality of Sts. Joseph and Fidenzio, as it has been done by the Patriarch in St. Lucy's on the 8th of this month of June. Hence I make my Diocese enjoy the first fruits of the pious and religious sovereign determinations brought about by his Imperial Decree of May 17, 1818, which establishes in this city an Institute so desired and eagerly waited for, for the public good to which it is totally directed and consecrated."<sup>37</sup>*

Therefore also in Verona, on June 26, 1819, the ceremony of the canonical erection takes place in simplicity and intense fervour, with the participation of many people from every condition of life. The Bishop, Msgr. I. Liruti presides over the rite. There are twelve Daughters of Charity around the altar.

On this occasion the Daughters of Charity in Verona take the religious habit, as was done two years before in Venice.

In 1821 Magdalene speaks of the long-awaited and important recognition of the Institute in the two dioceses:

*"These Vely Rev. Prelates accepted my petition with great benevolence. And first, the two of the Venetian Reign, that is, Msgr. Francesco Maria Milesi, Patriarch cvf Venice with his petition dated September 10, 1818, and Msgr. Innocenzo Maria Liruti, Bishop of Verona also with his dated October 3, 1818, turned to the Great General Venetian Government requesting it to implore his Majesty for this favour. They did this out of their goodness and not for the merit of the one pleading. The Government was pleased to comply, as did the two Prelates in whose c ities the first two houses of the Daughters of Charity had been open. The Prelates consequently received the Gracious Sovereign Decree of approval that was signed on February 18, 1819, and communicated to the Patriarch of Venice on April 11, 1819 and to the Bishop of Verona on May 17, 1819..."*

*The two Prelates with the formal canonical erection of the Institute approved these Rules: the Patriarch of Venice, by a special Decree and signing every page in his own handwriting, and the Bishop of Verona, giving them with his own hands to the Foundress at the formal public solemnity of the canonical erection, and formally asking that they be observed,"<sup>38</sup>*

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<sup>37</sup> Mons. I. Liruti, Vescovo di Verona, all'I.R. Governo Generale di Venezia, 21 giugno, 1819, Ep. 11/1, p. 234.

<sup>38</sup> M.d.C., Raggiungimento dell'Istituto (Report on the Institute) - Anno 1821 - EpIII/1. pp. 153-154

## Chapter VIII

### NEW SIGNIFICANT STAGES

#### Official approval in Milan

Having settled the Houses of Verona and Venice, the Foundress, on July 2, 1819 leaves for Milan. The Archbishop, Msgr. Gaysruck, whom she meets soon after, informs her that, even in the Lombard city, the government dispatch approving the Institute has arrived.

It is urgent to present a copy of the Rule to the same Archbishop. Hence the Foundress asks the Superior of Verona to promptly send her "the rough copy" previously given to Don Trevisani.

*"... I need that you ask Fr. Luigi for the rough copy of our Rules which I sent to him from Venice. Let our Beppa<sup>1</sup> make a parcel and kindly ask ... to send it by coach-nost."<sup>2</sup>*

After a faithful transcription of the only Rule, which has been initially dictated in Venice by Magdalene to Fr. Federico Bonlini and afterwards copied for Patriarch Milesi and the Bishop of Verona, now even the Archbishop of Milan receives it accompanied by a letter of the Foundress herself, for his approval.

In the letter it is said:

*"... I have the honour to enclose my letter with the two manuscripts which are the exact copy of our Rules. I remain with the hope that, as the other two Prelates gladly approved them, Your Excellence, in your goodness, will, in the same way and with no less fondest ension, approve them. Besides, I would like, if I do not flatter myself too much, that nothing be added ... in case some small modifications will seem to be required by the variety of places .... kindly notify me..."<sup>3</sup>*

Magdalene speaks of an "exact Copy" also here, therefore it is again confirmed that there is only one Rule.

A letter written after July 15 to Angela Bragato is another proof:

*"... during these few days in Milan, I had to prepare a copy of the Rules since the Archbishop has asked for it. It has been finished and I have sent it to the same."<sup>4</sup>*

Two great losses sadden the heart of Magdalene: the death of the Patriarch of Venice, only three months after the approval of the Institute, and that even more painful, of the incomparable supporter of her Work, Msgr. Pacetti, on December 18, 1819.

Though suffering the great loss of the one who has been the authorized interpreter of the will of the Holy Father, Magdalene has to work to find a substitute.

She turns to Card. Francesco Fontana, who, with the approval of His Holiness Pius VII, agrees to assign the three Directors, who had substituted for immediate and contingent matters, Msgr. Pacetti during his frequent absences. The three Priests were: Fr. Mariano da Cadore, for Venice, Don Nicola Galvani, for Verona and Don Francesco Zoppi for Milan.

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<sup>1</sup> It is Giuseppa Terragnoli.

<sup>2</sup> M.d.C., alla Bragato, luglio, 1819, 111/1, p. 320

<sup>3</sup> M.d.C., all'Arcivescovo di Milano, 15 luglio, 1819, Ep.II/1, pp.287-288

<sup>4</sup> M.d.C., alla Bragato, luglio, 1819, Ep. 111/1, p. 316.

The Pontiff himself, after the death of Msgr. Pacetti, approves the spiritual guides of the Institute for the three different cities:

*"His Holiness himself is very happy that your Excellency avails herself of the three persons suggested as Counsellors by the late Canon Pacetti".<sup>5</sup>*

To the Decree of approval of the Institute, dated February 18, 1819, the Government added some restrictions that were unacceptable to the Institute.

The Patriarch of Venice and the Bishop of Verona, after the canonical erection of the two Houses, in support of the Marchioness, asked, and obtained from the Government<sup>6</sup>, the suppression of such conditions.

The restrictions imposed by the Government, which were positively resolved by the two dioceses of Venice and Verona, are not as easily resolved in the diocese of Milan.

While waiting for an answer that is slow in coming, Msgr. Gaysruck advises Magdalene to draft an appendix to the Rule, already presented to the Lombard General Government, which is now asking for further explanations. Only after such requests are satisfied<sup>7</sup>, does the Government finally give its approval, on July 19, 1820.

The House cannot be canonically erected since it is only rented and not yet the property of the Institute. In the Report of 1821, Magdalene states:

*"The Archbishop of Milan ... having received the Sovereign approval, in his charity has taken the pleasure of approving the Rules. Besides putting his signature on each page he has added his authentic approval at the end of the two small volumes as well as of the Appendix, on July 29, 1820. In Milan we did not have the formal public erection of the House because the Institute does not own one in this city, as is required by the Government in order that the Institute be recognized."<sup>8</sup>*

#### **A new foundation in Bergamo**

Meanwhile, a lawyer of Bergamo, Saverio Gavazzeni, informed about the good the Daughters of Charity do in Verona, Venice and Milan, asks Magdalene for a foundation in his city, and offers, as initial place for their work, a small house he owns in Borgo S. Caterina.

Magdalene accepts the offer even though she will have to settle the other Houses before beginning her work in the city of Bergamo.

In fact, only after the news that the Decree of approval for Venice is imminent, she writes to Mr. Gavazzeni:

*"Today, the third day of the month, I have to tell you that my hopes to see the beginning of the House in Bergamo are greater than before, since this morning our esteemed Governor has given me the news that yesterday, feast of the Sorrows of Mary, OUI Lady and Mother, he received the signed formal approval of the Institute of the Daughters of Charity. It is true that this is only for Venice and Verona, but since the Virgin Mary has prepared everything for Milan too, I believe she will look favourably upon Bergamo..."<sup>9</sup>*

Eight months later, moved by ever more pressing requests from Bergamask personalities, and seeing the possibility of a foundation in this city, Magdalene decides to write to the Vicar Capitular, Msgr. Marco Celio Passi:<sup>10</sup>

*"Having been asked by some people, interested in religious and civil welfare, to establish the Institute ... also in this city, and since a small house in Borgo S. Caterina has been put at my disposal for this, and I*

<sup>5</sup> Card. Fontana, a M.d.C., 22 marzo, 1820, Ep. 11/1, p. 718.

<sup>6</sup> The official answer of the government is made known only on April 20 1820.

<sup>7</sup> cf. M.d.C., all'ArcivescovodiMilano, lidicembre, 1819, Ep. 11/1, pp. 288-289.

<sup>8</sup> M.d.C., Raguaglio dell'Istituto, (Report on the Institute) - Anno 1821, Ep. 11/1, p. 155.

<sup>9</sup> M.d.C., a Saverio Gavazzeni, 3 aprile, 1819, Ep. 11/1, p. 383.

<sup>10</sup> At that time the Bishop's See of Bergamo was vacant. cf. Ep. II/1, p. 404.

*.... feeling it necessary to comply with such a request, I turn to the piety and goodness of your illustrious Lordship, humbly asking to concur with your approval and your most effective mediation to the Imperial Government in regard to the proposed beneficial establishment.*

*I feel the duty to present to you, for your information, the Plan of the Institute, approved by His Imperial Majesty... "<sup>11</sup>*

The Vicar Capitular receives the Government approval only in July 1820.

This news is given to Magdalene in these terms:

*"With true exultation of the heart, I hasten to inform you that His Majesty, answering to my fervent plea, has deigned ... to approve the foundation of the pious Institute in this city ... in order to let you see in what gracious terms the sovereign approval is made, I send you a copy of the same. From this you will notice that it is necessary to send to this Curia the text of the Rules of the Institute together with the Appendix as well as the list of the young women, over 24 years of age, who wish to be members of this religious Society".<sup>12</sup>*

For this Diocese too, a copy of the only Rule is made. This time the transcription is done by a copyist from Milan, a certain Carlino.

This is confirmed by a letter of Magdalene:

*"I take this opportunity, my dear daughter, to send you the other part of the Rules so that Carlino may continue to write as fast as possible ... Be aware that in the chapter on the reception of novices, the companion who copied them made several mistakes ... Do me the favour to draw the attention of Carlino to it, so he may insert that short passage as marked. By ordinary mail, I will send the remaining part on Thursday, highly recommending to do the binding as soon as they are ready. If I have an occasion I can trust, I will send for them. But if they are bound, I will not send anybody to take the two hooks; send them to me by mail-coach... "<sup>13</sup>*

The ceremony for the canonical erection of the Institute in Bergamo is fixed for Sunday, September 17 1820, the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows.

On that day, as Magdalene writes in the Report of the Institute, took place the "formal erection of the House" and "the Rules of the Institute were publicly handed over to the Foundress ... by the Vicar Capitular" <sup>14</sup>

Already on that occasion it is realized that the house is not sufficiently large for the three "perennial and continuous" works of charity proper to the Institute.

Count Andrea Camozzi,<sup>15</sup> belonging to one of the noble and rich families of Bergamo and probably present at the ceremony, offers to Magdalene the Convent of the Capuchin Nuns at Rocchetta<sup>16</sup>, where the Daughters of Charity move into, in April 1821.<sup>17</sup>

The reasons for the transfer are explained in the request of Magdalene to the Ecclesiastical Authority of the Diocese:

*"The location of this building, closer to a greater number of poor, the convenience of the annexed church, the greater capacity of the house, made me consider such a spontaneous gift a new token of the goodness of Divine Providence for us."<sup>18</sup>*

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<sup>11</sup> M.d.C., al Vicario Capitolare di Bergamo, 19 dicembre, 1819, Ep. II/1, p.391.

<sup>12</sup> Vicario Capitolare di Bergamo, a M.d.C., 22 luglio, 1820, Ep. 11/1, p. 479.

<sup>13</sup> M.d.C., alla Bemardi, 15 agosto, 1820, Ep. 111/1, pp. 374-375.

<sup>14</sup> cf. M.d.C., Ragguaglio dell'Istituto (Report about the Institute), 1821, Ep. 11/1, p. 155.

<sup>15</sup> Count Andrea Camozzi de' Gherardi (1766-1855) married Countess Elisabetta Vertova. He had six children. He was from one of the noblest and old families of Bergamo. In spite of wealth and the connections with the highest aristocracy, he has always been most simple and upright.

<sup>16</sup> cf. M.d.C., alla Rosmini, 11 novembre, 1820, Ep. 111/1, p. 390

<sup>17</sup> cf. M.d.C., alla Rosmini, 21 marzo, 1821, Ep. III/1, p. 412.

<sup>18</sup> M.d.C., alla Curia Vescovile di Bergamo, 1821 gennaio, Ep. II/1, pp. 404-405.

## The canonical erection in Milan

The consolidation of the Institute in Milan is achieved by stages. In 1816, the first house is opened in the parish of St. Stephen.

In 1820, the Rules of the Daughters of Charity are approved. They are signed by the Bishop's Secretary, Canon Pietro Rudoni and countersigned by the Archbishop Carlo Gaetano Gaysruck.

The third stage is that of the canonical erection, or which the Institute is required to own a house.

The transactions for the purchase of a convent are not easy.

Only in July 1823, it is possible to obtain a contract for the purchase of the House, called the Certosina,<sup>19</sup> in Via della Chiusa.<sup>20</sup>

The official canonical erection of the House is celebrated on September 10, 1823, following the work of restoration.

The ceremony takes place in the Church of St. Stephen, where the first community started. And Magdalene has to take care of the transcription of two more copies of the Rules for the inaugural ceremony.

Always solicitous to inform the Houses about important events, Magdalene writes to Terragnoli, the Superior of the community in Venice:

*"...I want to write to you also today, being uncertain to be able to do it .... on Wednesday, when, if nothing untoward happens, the formal canonical erection of this House will take place. You may imagine, my dear daughter, how busy I am, most of all because we will certainly need one copy, or perhaps two, of our Rules for that occasion..."*<sup>21</sup>

After the ceremony, Magdalene informs Margherita Rosmini:

*"... know that on Wednesday the 10th, the formal erection of this least Institute, took place in the Parish of St. Stephen. The function was presided over by the Illustrious Archbishop. I must confess, for the glory of God and to my confusion, ... that it has been done with such a solemnity and the universal jubilation of people from every class... that I believe I will never see anything greater than this."*<sup>22</sup>

## The Daughters of Charity even in Trent

Even the city of Trent claims the presence of the Daughters of Charity, because it lacks Religious Institutes of women and is in need of works of charity.

The persons who help such a foundation are Margherita Rosmini and Msgr. Emanuele Sardagna, Vicar Capitular of this city.

In 1824 Margherita joins the Institute of the Daughters of Charity and collaborates in the realization of the project with financial help and apostolic zeal.

Already in 1822, Magdalene has written to her:

*"I hear, my dear friend, that the Lord maintains in you the same desires in favour of Trent. I must confess that he makes mine grow, and I hope that the Lord will, one day, realize that foundation ... The father of our Beatrice of Riva<sup>23</sup> who came to see her- without knowing anything, ... insisted to convince me to think of Trent, describing ... the very great needs of that place."*<sup>24</sup>

It is, however, necessary to find a suitable house.

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<sup>19</sup> cf. M.d.C. alla Terragnoli, 27 luglio, 1823, Ep. 111/1, p. 659

<sup>20</sup> The new house was located near S. Michele alla Chiusa in the parish of S. Lorenzo. It was the Hospice of the Carthusians. In 1823 a Pious society of which Count Mellerio and Marquis Casati were members, bought the hospice and donated it to the Institute.

<sup>21</sup> M.d.C., alla Terragnoli, 3 settembre, 1823, Ep. 111/1, p. 670

<sup>22</sup> M.d.C., alla Rosmini, settembre. 1823. En. III/1 p. 675

<sup>23</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Beatrice Ohvieri from Riva of Trent who entered in Verona in 1820.

At that time, the only available and appropriate place, seems to be the ex-convent of the Franciscan Fathers.<sup>25</sup>

Magdalene, in regard to this, tells M. Rosmini on September 7, 1822:

*"... on my part I do not have any difficulty that the Institute be established in the convent of St. Francis, as Msgr. Vicar writes to me."<sup>26</sup>*

Magdalene is concerned to have the juridical stability of the house of Trent, so as not to incur the same problem as in Milan, because of the temporary accommodation of the Community.

She works, therefore, from 1823 to 1826 to obtain the Imperial Decree for the gratuitous concession of the convent of St. Francis.

The Decree bears the date Jan. 24, 1826.<sup>27</sup>

Magdalene gives the news to her Milanese friend with great satisfaction:

*"I must tell you, my dear friend, a thing which I am sure will bring you great joy. During these days, I have been privately informed from Trent that the Sovereign Decree, with which His Majesty deigns to donate to me the convent of St. Francis, has arrived. I am waiting for the official notice of such a Decree from this Imperial Government. Before the convent can be inhabited, many months will pass, because it needs to be repaired."<sup>28</sup>*

And to the same, fifteen days later:

*"...on Monday, God willing, I will leave for Trent with my dear Rosmini who will take the habit this evening. Know that His Majesty, our August Sovereign, has deigned to donate to me the said monastery. Now I go only for a visit to personally see the place and devise all measures necessary for the repair of the house and for everything else."<sup>29</sup>*

The work of the restoration of the convent and of the church lasts two years.

When everything is completed, in 1828, Magdalene nominates Giuseppina Margherita Rosmini Superior of Trent, as a sign of maternal gratitude and trust in her abilities and virtues.

On June 21, 1828, the formal erection of the fifth house of the Institute takes place, with a ceremony presided over by the Prince Bishop Saverio Luskin.<sup>30</sup>

Magdalene describes the ceremony to her friend C. Durini:

*"Last Saturday, the solemn canonical erection took place. The Prince Bishop followed the same method as the one used in Milan. He too blessed the veils and medals as His Eminence did."<sup>31</sup>*

To give the news of the foundation in Trent to Msgr. Zoppi she writes thus:

*"On the feast of St. Aloysius, this Prince Bishop carried out the formal erection in our church dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows after whom the Convent is named...."*

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<sup>25</sup> M.d.C. alla Rosmini, 22 gennaio, 1822, Ep. 111/1, p.478.

<sup>26</sup> The ex-convent of the Friars Minor at the outskirts of Trent (now Venice Square). The convent, together with a large church and vegetable-garden had been bought by Margherita Rosmini from the State.

<sup>27</sup> M.d.C., alla Rosmini, 7 settembre, 1822, Ep. 111/1, p. 560.

cf. Archivio Vescovile di Trento, libro B no. 257 18/1826, no. 720/176 Schul.

Magdalene gives the news to her Milanese friend with great satisfaction:

<sup>28</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini. 1 febbraio, 1826, Ep. 1, p. 533.

<sup>29</sup> M.d.C. alla Durini, 16 febbraio, Ep.1 p.535.

<sup>30</sup> Msgr. Francesco Saverio Luskin, from Carinzia, provincial Councillor of Tirolo, whose See was then in Innsbruck. In 1823 he was elected Bishop of Trent

<sup>31</sup> M.d.C., alla Durini, 28 giugno, 1828, Ep. 1, p.536.

*He delivered a very beautiful homily, and afterwards sent an equally beautiful decree, in which he approves the Rules and declares us directly subject to him.*"<sup>32</sup>

Now, being requested to open new Houses in other cities of Italy, then divided into many States, and since each foundation implies more and more laborious governmental and ecclesiastical juridical practices, Magdalene decides to speed up transactions so that the Institute be declared of Pontifical Right, and the Rules, already approved by the Bishops of five Dioceses, may have the approval of the Supreme Pontiff.

## **CHAPTER IX**

### **THE FINAL APPROVAL**

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<sup>32</sup> M.d.C.. a Mons. ZoPpi, 29 luglio, 1828, Ep. 11/2, p. 1107





## Chapter IX

### THE FINAL APPROVAL

#### Magdalene of Canossa and Cardinal Zurla

When in 1816 the Rule had been presented to the Holy Father Pius VII through Card. Fontana, the Supreme Pontiff answered with a laudatory Brief addressed to Msgr. Pacetti on November 20, 1816. In it, the Work of the Daughters of Charity was praised and appreciated. The Foundress, Magdalene of Canossa was encouraged to continue along that line, but as it was clearly stated, the Rule, in order to be formally approved, was to be examined, point by point, by the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars instituted for such a task.

In this Brief we read:

*"As for those Rules, since they need the solemn apostolic approval, it is necessary that they be diligently considered, examined and pondered over one by one, as it is usually done by this Holy See. This task is reserved to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars which is appointed for it."*<sup>1</sup>

Many years will have to pass, before the longed for pontifical approval of the Rule is obtained.

Meanwhile, Card. Francesco Fontana, a valid supporter of the Institute, dies on March 19, 1822. But Providence prepares for the Daughters of Charity a new Cather and protector: Placido Zurla,<sup>2</sup> who was elected cardinal by Pius VII in 1823.

The Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, on which the approval of the Rule depends, meets very seldom and is very cautious, especially when the approval requested is for new forms of consecrated life.

The Institute of Magdalene of Canossa is an authentic innovation, if compared with other Institutes of strict enclosure.

Card. Placido Zurla, on May 22, 1823, writes to Magdalene, that the Sacred Congregation is not of the opinion of approving the Rule of a Religious Institute which draws away from traditional forms and is without enclosure:

*"In the last meeting of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, it has been noted that it is not opportune that the Holy See give a favourable approval to Institutes of Charity without enclosure, because they depend essentially on the Bishops and on particular situations and needs. This has led the same Congregation to sign a commendation of your Institute which has been favourably judged and praised. For your consolation, I will afterwards send you this document. You will tell me how to return the manuscripts to you. "*<sup>3</sup>

Confronted with this difficulty, Magdalene is surprised by the negative results of her request, but accepts with docility the dispositions of the Holy See. However, she holds on to the hope of attaining a positive solution when the time will be ripe for it.

Answering Card. Zurla, she says:

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<sup>1</sup> Pio VII, Breve di lode, a Mons. Pacetti, 20 novembre, 1816, ms. originale A2, A.C.R.

<sup>2</sup> Card. Placido Zurla, in the world Marquis Pietro, (1769-1834). He entered the Camaldolese Monastery of S. Michele di Murano, Venice, at the age of 18. He was General Definer of his Order and was elected Abbot of S. Michele di Murano, in 1809. During the period of the suppression of the religious orders, he had been transferred to Padua. After the fall of Napoleon, he was called by the Patriarch to teach Philosophy at the Seminary. In the fall of 1821, he became seriously ill. Once recovered, he entered the Convent of S. Gregono al Celio in Rome, to take up again his Camaldolese life. He became Consultor of various Roman Congregations and a member of many Academies. He was made Cardinal by Pius VII in 1823.

<sup>3</sup> Card. P. Zurla, a M.d.C., 22 maggio, 1823, Ep. 11/1, p. 720.

*"I cannot hide being surprised about the decision reached by the Sacred Congregation in regard to our poor Institute, especially because I was convinced there would be a different conclusion. However, in all sincerity, I can assure Your Most Rev. Eminence that I am very happy for everything, and fully convinced that, whatever is judged to be the best by the Holy Father, your Eminence .... and the Sacred Congregation, is truly the best. It only seems to me that you will not be displeased if I retain the hope that, perhaps at another time, after further experimentation of the Institute, the Lord will let me have what you now consider not opportune to grant me."*<sup>4</sup>

A month later, precisely in July 1823, Providence ordains that Card. Zurla be nominated his Vicar by Pope Pius VII. But Pius VII dies on August 20 of the same year.

This loss is deeply felt by Magdalene. Having the previous year also lost Card. Francesco Fontana, the "father and protector" of the Institute, she turns to Card. Zurla, not only to thank him for the interest shown, but to plead with him to take the place of the late Card. Fontana:

*"... Let me ... express my deep and sincere gratitude, and plead that you will continue your protection over us. Besides, know that I had the fortune to have Card. Fontana, whom you had known well, as father and protector too, until his death. Now, clearly knowing that the Lord has put into the heart of your Very Rev. Eminence the same concern and fatherly charity for us as that of the late Card Fontana, I am therefore pleading with you to accept to be our father, assuring you that, though we are so miserable, we shall deal with you as daughters..."*<sup>5</sup>

Card. Zurla, just before entering the Conclave, answers that he will continue giving his fatherly protection to the Institute of the Daughters of Charity:

*"At the moment of entering the Conclave, I receive your letter. I write these few lines as a sign of my pleasure and of my absolute willingness to do everything I can for your Institute..."*<sup>6</sup>

On Sept. 28, Annibale Sermattei della Genga is elected Supreme Pontiff. He takes the name Leo XII.<sup>7</sup>

In October, Msgr. Zoppi has to go to Rome for his episcopal consecration. Magdalene takes this occasion to send to Card. Zurla a letter of thanks and presentation of the Institute together with the manuscripts of the Rule, so that, times and situations being changed, he may proceed with the request for the approval of the Institute:

*"I avail myself of this fortunate opportunity<sup>8</sup> to fulfill this pleasant duty. The person<sup>9</sup> who delivers this letter to you will more fully express on my behalf, my respects and also my deepest gratitude ... Now, our four Houses, being fully established after overcoming all obstacles, I receive requests for other foundations ... and various Bishops of different Dioceses express the desire to have the Institute. Therefore trusting that the Lord will continue to bless us, since the Institute is established in different Dioceses and Provinces, ... in order to be sure that the Rules remain as they presently are, it seems to me that ... this could be the moment to request for that formal supreme approval which it had been necessary to wisely postpone in the past. Therefore, Very Rev. Eminence, this is the very important matter I am putting into your hands."*

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<sup>4</sup> M.d.C., al Card. Zurla, 6 giugno, 1823, Ep. 11/1, p. 564.

<sup>5</sup> M.d.C., al Card. Zurla, fino di agosto, IX23, Ep. 11/1, p. 570.

<sup>6</sup> Car. Zurla, a M.d.C., 2 settembre, 1823, Ep. 11/1, p. 723.

<sup>7</sup> For biographical notes cf. M.d.C., Ep. 1, p. 530.

<sup>8</sup> Msgr. Zoppi's journey to Rome

<sup>9</sup> it is Msgr. Zoppi

*It is for this purpose that Msgr. Zoppi is bringing the two small volumes approved by the Bishops and accepted by the Government. To these are also attached the Bishops' Decrees and the approval of the Sovereign and of the Government*

...

*Monsignor will also bring the copy of the Rules which has been already presented to Our Holy Father<sup>10</sup>. At the end of the volume there is the letter<sup>11</sup> with which you deigned to console me...<sup>12</sup>*

Afterwards, Magdalene writes even to Msgr. Zoppi who is already in Rome. She sends him the part of the Rule not yet copied at the time of his departure, and notifies him of some corrections and additions made to the manuscripts he has taken with him:

*"... together with my letter you will receive the part of the Rules that was missing in those you kindly took with you ...*

*With regard to the Rules, I wrote anew those for the Hospital, and for some tasks. I believe it is good to tell you that the difference between these and those contained in the book where there are the Decrees and the report on the foundations, is very small. As for the tasks, you will find that there are only two points added to those already described in the large volume . . . "*<sup>13</sup>

Card. Zurla, after receiving from Msgr. Zoppi the small volumes of the Rules, answers the Marchioness. He says that he has spoken to Leo XII about the Institute and hopes that the new examination of the Rule on the part of the Sacred Congregation will have positive results:

*"May the Lord be blessed for using me as his instrument to help this Institute dedicated to his glory. I received your letter together with the three volumes of the Rules and the appendix, from the eminent Msgr. Zoppi...*

*Know that, the day before yesterday, I went to see the Holy Father<sup>14</sup> just to speak to him about the Institute and its approval ... For this, there will be the usual formalities, I have no doubt...<sup>15</sup>*

After a delay of more than six months in the work of the revision of the Rule, the Cardinal thinks it is his duty to justify his silence with the Foundress:

*"What will my good daughters, the Marchioness of Canossa and her followers (whom I consider as such), say about the very great delay in this thing due to them and entrusted to me?*

*I cannot say how bad I feel for such a slowness that has not yet come to an end ... the Congregation meets very seldom and there is need for patience. "*<sup>16</sup>

Magdalene, about a month later, writes in return:

*"Very Rev. Eminence, I do not find words suitable to explain my veneration, respect and gratitude for the Holy Father, who, in many ways, favours us, and for you, to whom I attribute even the favours received from the Holy Father. Do not worry about the delay of the approval. I find the greatest consolation in knowing that His Holiness and your Eminence are fully in agreement "*<sup>17</sup>

Time goes on and no news comes from Rome.

The Foundress is worried, also because she has a Presentiment that she will not have many more years left to live, therefore she would like to see her Institute definitively settled.

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<sup>10</sup> it is Pope Pius VII.

<sup>11</sup> cf. Card. Zurla, a M.d.C, 22 maggio, 1823, Ep. 11/1, p. 720.

<sup>12</sup> M.d.C., al Card. Zurla, IX ottobre, 1823, Ep. 11/1, pp. 572-574.

<sup>13</sup> M.d.C.. a Msgr. Zoppi. Ep. II/1, p. 579

<sup>14</sup> It is his Holiness Leo XII.

<sup>15</sup> Card. Zurla, a M.d.C., 18 novembre, 1823, Ep. 11/1, pp. 723-724.

<sup>16</sup> Card Zurla, a M.d.C. 6 luglio, 1824, Ep. 11/1, p. 724.

<sup>17</sup> M.d.C., a Card. Zurla, 24 agosto, 1824, Ep. 11/1, p. 586.

In October 1828, Magdalene is in Coriano<sup>18</sup>. After visiting her "Treasure", Our Lady of Loreto<sup>19</sup>, to whom she fervently recommends the Institute, she expresses to Card. Zurla her desire to go to Rome, but waits for an answer from him before leaving:

*"... on such an occasione<sup>20</sup>, I could not help going to visit the venerated shrine of Our Most Holy Mother in Loreto. For the second time I would be only a hundred and fifty miles away from Rome. Reflecting on my advanced age and on my strength that is worn out by the kind of life which my duties require, I reasonably deduced that this would be the last time for me to be able to do it. Therefore I could not resist the great desire to make a brief visit to the tombs of the Holy Apostles and to have the fortune to kiss the feet of the Holy Father and your Sacred Purple ...  
I could not undertake this last leg of my journey with full joy if your Eminence, in your kindness, would not assure me with a few lines that you were not displeased...."<sup>21</sup>*

### From Loreto to Rome

After a positive answer from the Cardinal and the strength that the Virgin of Loreto has put in her heart, Magdalene continues her journey.

She leaves Loreto on October 14 and arrives in Rome on the 20th.

The reasons and details of this journey are notified to Msgr. Zoppi<sup>22</sup> and Angela Bragato.

To the latter Magdalene writes:

*"...since I stayed in Loreto for six or seven days, uncertain if I could go to Rome, as I later did ... and the journey from Loreto to here, having taken seven days, I believe that this is the reason why I did not receive letters from anyone ... Thanks to the Lord, we arrived safely in Rome*

...

*Yesterday<sup>23</sup> I had the honour to meet his Eminence the Vicar, Card. Zurla, who deigned to come to greet me...*

*I have the great hope to be fortunate enough, within a few days, to kiss the feet of the Holy Father..."<sup>24</sup>*

### A private audience of Leo XII

At the beginning of November, Magdalene is received for an audience, by Pope Leo XII.

On November 5, 1828, writing to A. Bragato, who has the charge to transmit the news to all the Sisters, Magdalene manifests her feelings:

*"... Know that today I had the fortune to be at the feet of the Holy Father. I cannot say with what unspeakable goodness he deigned to receive me. I assure you that sanctity and charity were shining forth from his face. I pleaded with him to bless my family and all of you ..."<sup>25</sup>*

This is how Magdalene pleads with the Holy Father, Leo XII, for the approval of the Institute and the Rule:

*"Most Holy Father,*

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<sup>18</sup> Coriano is a small town of Romagna, where Magdalene went some times, invited by Fr. Giacomo Gabellini, to see the Conservatory of the "Maestre Pie dell'Adolorata" started by the zeal of Elisabetta Renzi who would have liked to join it to the Canossian Institute.

<sup>19</sup> The Basilica of Loreto (of XVI century) in the Province of Ancona. According to tradition, the Holy House of Nazareth had been transported here towards the end of the XII century.

<sup>20</sup> it is her journey to Coriano.

<sup>21</sup> M.d.c., al Card. Zurla, 3 ottobre, 1828, Ep. 11/1, pp. 612-613.

<sup>22</sup> cf. M.d.C., a Mons. Zoppi, 21 novembre, 1828, Ep. 11/1, P. 614.

<sup>23</sup> it is October 29, 1828.

<sup>24</sup> M.d.c.. alla Bragato. 30 ottobre. 1828. Ep. 111/3. pp. 2036-2037.

<sup>25</sup> M.d.C., alla Bragato, 5 novembre, 1828, Ep. 111/3, p. 2042.

*Magdalene of Canossa, prostrated at the feet of Your Holiness, most earnestly expresses her desire to see approved with Apostolic Authority her Institute of the Daughters of Charity, which, under the protection of Our Lady of Sorrows, has started in Verona and spread to Milan, Venice, Bergamo and Trent.*

*The utmost clemency with which Your Holiness and your glorious predecessor, Pius VII, deigned to look at this humble Institute, makes the speaker bold to implore such a grace, all the more because the requests for new houses in other cities are increasing. It becomes, therefore, necessary to have a Rule with an unchangeable uniformity and strength which can be obtained only from the one who, by the will of God, presides over the Universal Church.*<sup>126</sup>

The Rule, defined as "unabridged"<sup>27</sup> or lengthy<sup>28</sup> by the Foundress herself, has many exhortatory parts. Some Prelates, therefore, ask her to reduce it to the essentials, in order to make the reading of it easier and quicker for the Bishops of the Sacred Congregation.

Magdalene prolongs her stay in Rome in the apartment rented in Via Campo Marzio, n. 8<sup>29</sup>. Helped by her secretary Cristina Pilotti, she undertakes with enthusiasm the laborious task of dictating the essential parts of the Unabridged Rule, giving it a schematic and normative form.

In fact, it is always the only Rule "accepted by the Government and approved by the Bishops" of the Dioceses where the Houses of the Institute have already been opened.

She informs Msgr. Zoppi:

*"I took away the exhortatory parts from the Rules approved by the Bishops. As you well know, these are the Rules known and also accepted by the Government."*<sup>30</sup>

To Msgr. Antonio M. Traversi<sup>31</sup>, who, at the death of Fr. Marino di Cadore, became, in 1827, Superior of Venice and afterwards Spiritual Father of the whole Institute, Magdalene repeats in a more specific way what she had written to Msgr. Zoppi about the Rule:

*"... I summarized ... the Rule, the one known and accepted by our Government and approved by the Bishops. I omitted all the exhortatory parts and made it simple, clarifying some little things which could be the cause of anxiety for the companions."*<sup>32</sup>

The Rule, so modified, is ready towards the end of October. Magdalene can inform one of her daughters that "within a few days she will have the fortune to kiss the feet of the Holy Father".<sup>33</sup>

The private audience is in fact granted by Leo XII for November 5.

At her request for a solicitous approval of the Rule,<sup>34</sup> the Holy Father let her understand that the work of revision done by the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars generally takes a lengthy time, and that it will be still necessary to wait. Magdalene, with a daring characteristic of her and animated by holy courage, pleads with His Holiness that he would nominate a special Congregation.

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<sup>26</sup> M.d.C., al Santo Padre Leone XII, Sad. Ep. 11/1, p. 624.

<sup>27</sup> M.d.C., alla Rosmini, 16 febbraio, 1832, Ep. 111/4, p. 3029: "I read the approved Rule and did not find in it what ... is prescribed in the Unabridged Rule...".

<sup>28</sup> cf. M.d.C., alla Rosmini, 3 febbraio, 1832, Ep. 111/4, p. 3023: "Regarding the wish of Msgr. Sardagna to have our lengthy Rules ... you may send them ... I am pleased."

cf. M.d.C., The last wills of the dying Foundress, April 9, 1835, Ep. 111/5, p. 4147: "ZAs for the Constitutions I want the lengthy Rules ...".

<sup>29</sup> Mr. Bernardo Bolognesi procured for the two pilgrims a "beautiful apartment" in the premises of Mr. Luigi Bensi. (Ep. 1, p. 543)

<sup>30</sup> M.d.C., a Mons. Zoppi, 13 dicembre, 1828, Ep. 11/1, p. 620.

<sup>31</sup> Antonio Maria Traversi (1765-1842). He was ordained a priest in 1787. Later he became the Director of the Imperial R. Boarding Lyceum of Venice. In 1827 he became the Spiritual Father of the Daughters of Charity in Venice.

<sup>32</sup> M.d.C., a Mons. Traversi, 10 gennaio, 1829, EP. 11/1, P. 629.

<sup>33</sup> M.d.C., alla Bragato, 30 ottobre, 1828, EP. 111/3, p. 2037.

<sup>34</sup> cf M d C. a Mons.Zoppi. 13 dicembre. 1828. Ep. II/1. p. 620.

The Pope grants her request and forms a Commission of three Cardinals: Odescalchi, Zurla and Bertazzoli, which in a few days examines and approves the Rules.

Magdalene relates the extraordinary nature of this event to Msgr. Zoppi, on December 13, 1828, as follows:

*"I had the first audience with the Holy Father, who received me with unspeakable charity. I pleaded with him for the approval of the Rule, and since he said that the matter would take a long time, for the examination by the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars was lengthy, I took the courage to plead with him that he would nominate a special Congregation..."*

*His Holiness appointed for such an examination the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, the Cardinal Vicar and Card. Bertazzoli. It pleased the Lord that they would not change even a word. The Congregation gave its formal vote of approval and His Holiness formally countersigned and approved it. Last Saturday, the eve of the Immaculate Conception, the Cardinal Prefect sent them to me approved and signed. Do me the charity to thank the Lord and Mary, on my behalf."<sup>35</sup>*

Magdalene would like to leave Rome immediately, but she is advised to remain at least for the rest of December, because the abundant snowfalls and the cold would make the road impassable.

She asks the Supreme Pontiff, through his Vicar, to bless her journey. But in his goodness Leo XII did more than this.

Magdalene writes thus to Msgr. Zoppi:

*"... the Holy Father deigned to answer that if I would delay my departure ... he would receive me, as he did, on Sunday. I was so confused by such a great charity that I do not even know well what I have said to him."<sup>36</sup>*

The return journey can start only on January 20. A few days before that Magdalene writes to Msgr. Traversi:

*"It is several weeks since I am ready to leave at any moment ... on my part, I would have been satisfied that the Brief would be sent to Rimini and to Verona."<sup>37</sup>*

Instead the Approval of the Rule and of the Institute travels with her. Only on her arrival at Verona, she makes known to the Daughters the true reasons of her journey to Rome.

In fact, in none of the letters addressed to the Sisters during her prolonged stay in Rome, did she mention the most pressing preoccupation that was keeping her there.

The Rule finally has the juridical approval of the Church.

From the first draft of Venice, dated 1812, 16 long years have passed.

Even though the Church has asked to reduce it into more brief and concise articles, it did not lose anything of its original spirit.

To "hand down entire and perfect the spirit of the Institute"<sup>38</sup>, Magdalene often refers to the "lengthy Rules" where the charity of Christ Crucified unifies and gives meaning to what might sound just normative.

In her "last wills" too, dictated to Cristina Pilotti the day before her death, the Foundress uses the expression "I want" when speaking about the orientation to be kept by the Superiors in drafting the Directory on the basis of the approved Rule.

*"I want that for the Constitutions<sup>39</sup> the lengthy Rules be taken."<sup>40</sup>*

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<sup>35</sup> M.d.C., a Mons. Zoppi, 13 dicembre, 1828, Ep. II/1, pp. 620-621.

<sup>36</sup> M.d.C., a Mons. Zoppi, 13 dicembre, 1828, Ep. II/1, p. 621.

<sup>37</sup> Jan. 3, 1829. M.d.C., a Mons. Traversi, 10 gennaio, 1829, Ep. 11/1, pp. 629-630.

<sup>38</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. Ia, p. 165.

<sup>39</sup> The term Constitutions (or Directory) is to be understood as explanatory norms of the articles of the Rule.

<sup>40</sup> Last wills of the dying Foundress, Ep. 111/5, p. 4147. Lengthy Rules corresponds to the Unabridged Rule, which was given to the Cardinals, and which Magdalene was advised to simplify.

It is the recommendation, rather the command of one who is conscious of having received a precious patrimony to be preserved and handed down intact to all the daughters who will come to be part of the Canossian Family.

The Spirit of the Institute has its source in the heart of Christ Crucified himself, in whom the love towards the Father and all men finds unity.

### **The Institute belongs to God and to the Church**

On December 23, 1828, Pope Leo XII signs the Decree of Approval of the Institute and the Rules which Magdalene will have in her hands on January 3, 1829.

In the Decree, among other things, it is said:

*"... it is certainly a cause of infinite joy ... for us, called by divine Providence to govern the whole sheepfold of Christ, ... to know that there are some who, because of the commitment they have to make sure of their vocation and election, walk in the ways of the Lord trying to be of good example to others with all the most beautiful virtues.*

*Among these, we rightly number the sacred Institute of virgins, whose first foundation has been laid down by our beloved daughter in Christ, the Marchioness Magdalene of Canossa, through the divine help, in Verona her native town. This Institute, making deeper roots in the course of time and by heavenly favours, has spread in Verona and Venice, then in Bergamo, Milan and Trent.*

*By the very name that these virgins have taken of Daughters of Charity, it is easy to see of what great help and enrichment to the civil and Christian society they can be ... we could not help accepting benevolently the supplication their Foundress presented to us, asking that the Rules or Constitutions necessary for the good running of the above-named family, be approved by our supreme Power, all the more because the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, to which I entrusted them to be pondered over, has declared, after a careful examination, that the same do not lack anything necessary to form a sacred Family and attain the aim set by the Institute."<sup>41</sup>*

Magdalene of Canossa has attained the goal so much desired.

Now the Institute has formed stable and deep roots in the Holy Church. God himself has approved and blessed her institution, the fruit of so much fatigue and sacrifices.

Before leaving the city of the Holy Apostles, she communicates to Msgr. Traversi her immense happiness:

*"...on Saturday evening, the third day of this month<sup>42</sup>, I received the Brief of approval....*

*... Now I am sure that nobody will alter the Institute established by us; know, rather, that in the Rule approved here, I added that Verona will always be the first House of the Institute, since this has had its beginning in our State."<sup>43</sup>*

The term "us", used here for the first time by Magdalene betrays her authority as Foundress, Directress and Mother. She, after placing the Institute, born of God and of herself, in the hands of the Vicar of Christ, feels assured that "nobody" will ever be able to alter the spirit which animates it.

That same Rule pervaded by the Spirit of Jesus Crucified and inspired by God in 1812, after a long interior trial and almost twenty years of life experience within the Institute, has received the supreme sanction of the universal Church.

Now the Institute can expand, according to the deep desire of the Foundress, in other parts of Italy and of the world, but the spirit that animates the Rule is one and unchangeable.

In concluding it, Magdalene, addressing each of her daughters, of every time and every place, recommends:

*"Let each one of you ... on your part, hand down the Institute entire and perfect to those coming after you"<sup>44</sup>*

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<sup>41</sup> Sua Santità Leone XII, 23 dicembre 1828, Ep. II/1, pp. 731-732

<sup>42</sup> Jan. 3, 1829

<sup>43</sup> M.d.C., a Mons. TRaversi, 10 gennaio 1829, Ep. II/1, pp. 629-630



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## ABBREVIATIONS

### DOCUMENTS OF THE INSTITUTE

A.C.R.	Canossian Archives in Rome
Ep.	Correspondence of Magdalene of Canossa ( edited by M.E. Dossi)
M.d.C.	Magdalene of Canossa
R.s.s.	Magdalene of Canossa, <i>Rules and Spriritual Writings</i> (prepared by M.E. Dossi)
R dSdC.	Rules of the Sisters of Charity

### VARIOUS

cf.	compare
ms./ mss.	manuscript / manuscripts
p./pp	page / pages
P.	Part
Q.	Notebook

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