

## DOCUMENTATION SERIES

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### MAGDALENE OF CANOSSA : FOUNDRRESS

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ELDA POLLONARA

MAGDALENE  
OF CANOSSA  
AND  
THE FIRST  
FORMATION

Maria Nicolai F.d.C.C. - Original Title:  
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This volume, the third in the series «*Collana Documents, Magdalene of Canossa - Foundress*», intends to present the subject, best loved and considered as the most important by the Foundress for the vitality and growth of the Institute.

In every living organism, the heart is the most important part for its very life and development. And the Foundress, from the very start of her religious Family, is anxious to form the heart of her Institute. She draws up clear and precise directives on this subject of first formation and intends them to be for Superiors, those in charge of formation and aspirants to the religious life.

The entire work is drawn from the genuine source of the writings of the Foundress, who according to a firsthand witness, «dictated her Rules... which seemed as though drawn out from the Spirit of the Lord!». <sup>1</sup>

I have referred in a special way to the three documents which deal with first formation in detail.

The first is a chapter from the *Unabridged Rules of Venice* <sup>2</sup>, which dates back to 1812. In it, Magdalene gives a treatise relevant to the Mistress of Novices.

The second is a chapter intended for Superiors who are responsible for accepting young aspirants to the religious life and we find this in the *Unabridged Rules of Milan*, dated 1820. <sup>3</sup>

The third is a pamphlet, discovered recently, and still in manuscript, in which the Foundress drew up a summary pertaining to first formation under the heading «*Rules of Novitiate*». <sup>4</sup>

In addition to these specific sources are the numerous letters sent by the Foundress to the Superiors of the various houses and above all to the Mistress in charge of the novices. In these letters emerge the wisdom and the concern she had while personally following «*the future hopes of the Institute*». <sup>5</sup>

The present volume is divided into three parts. In the first are the many documented criteria for selection used by the Foundress for accepting young girls in her Institute.

In the second, it shows how Magdalene intended the pre-novitiate preparation to be, what steps she proposed to the Novice Mistress in charge of the young candidates and what the agents of formation were. she also gives some of her personal evaluation of individual postulants.

All this will help progress towards the unity of life that in Christ Crucified finds the supreme revelation and the source of that Charity which can spur the Canossian to “*offer her own life*” <sup>6</sup> for her fellowmen.

May this new publication help to discover the heart of the Mother we have in common and help to shed light on the criteria, on the contents and evaluation of the various phases of formation, which are as valid today, as yesterday, for preserving and *handing down integrally and perfectly, the spirit of the Institute*». <sup>7</sup>

**Elda Pollonara**

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<sup>1</sup> T.M. Piccari, *Sola con Dio solo*, ed. Ancora, Milano, 1966, p. 857

<sup>2</sup> *Unabridged Rules*: These were drawn up by the Foundress prior to those which the Church approved in 1828. The latter are very brief due to the explicit wish of the Holy See. (cf. M.d.C., Ep.III/4, p. 3029).

<sup>3</sup> M.d.C., On reception of the Novices, in U.R., p. 106

<sup>4</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., p. 8. 5

<sup>5</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. 1<sup>^</sup>, p. 131.

<sup>6</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. 1a, p. 219.

<sup>7</sup> Ivi, p. 165.

In this work, besides the relevant sources of the published writings of the Foundress, I often refer to two other documents which canoe to light recently. They are still in manuscript form preserved in the historical Archives of Rome.

The two booklets, of almost identical content, are entitled respectively: «*Rules of the Novitiate*» and «*Little Rules of the Novitiate*». The first comprises nineteen pages of continuous draft. The second comprises fourteen pages which consist of forty-two articles. It is interesting to note that the second one has on it the corrections made by Anna Rizzi, a contemporary of the Foundress. The writing of the entire document has been identified as that of Theresa Tron<sup>8</sup>, a Daughter of Charity who also lived during the early days of the Institute.

The fact that these two booklets contain the original thoughts of the Foundress is substantiated by the discovery of a copy of the *Unabridged Rules* in the Provincial Archive of Padova, dated prior to 1820<sup>9</sup> and in this the «*Rules of the Novitiate*» are found incorporated between the «*Rules of the Daughters of Charity*» and «*Preface to the Constitutions of the Foundress Magdalene of Canossa, dated Saturday 10 January 1835*».<sup>10</sup>

Also these «*Rules of the Novitiate*» are divided into 42 articles, but there are no subsequent corrections made by Rizzi.

Another element pointing to the authenticity of the two documents in question is the date of the treatise written for the «*Mistress of the Novices*», included in the «*Unabridged Rules*» of Venice, dated 1872. In it the Foundress mentions the «*Rules of the novitiate*» at least five times.

This signifies that the pamphlet regarding the «*Rules of the Novitiate*» was written prior to 1812, the year in which Magdalene dictated the first «*Unabridged Rules*». Even the style reveals the spirit of the one who dictated the entire «*Rule of the Daughters of Charity*».

Of the three above-mentioned documents, I cite in preference the one which I feel is the oldest, the one that is entitled: «*Rules of the novitiate*» and is referred to throughout this work. I cite this document for two reasons; chiefly because the Foundress in the treatise on the Mistress of the Novices mentions «*Rules of the novitiate*» and not «*Little rules of the novitiate*» and also because this pamphlet, subdivided into articles, has the same content as the first-mentioned but disregards minute details. This indicates that the pamphlet mentioned before, «*Rules of the novitiate*», drawn up in draft, is the oldest and the one that is nearest to the original inspirations of the Foundress.<sup>11</sup>

**The author**

<sup>8</sup> Teresa Tron, born at Venice on 3 February, 1788. Entered Religious Life on 30 October, 1838 and died on 25 April, 1865.

<sup>9</sup> Two points in the Rules date them as before 1820: Article I of the Chapter on the Charity towards God, in which two hours of meditation per day are requested of the Daughters; the vows are taken by the Sisters in the presence of the Foundress. These two points do not appear in the Unabridged Rules of Milan dated 1820

<sup>10</sup> Such a statement is given only after the first article of the Constitutions, or the Directory. The few pages that follow are blank. The articles which follow are elaborated, together with those for the Superiors of the newly founded Houses, in the first chapter which was found in the keeping of Angela Bragato, the Second Superior General of the Institute.

<sup>11</sup> N.B. The study of the writings of Anna Rizzi and Teresa Tron was entrusted to Fr. Luca Laner, an expert in recognising writings of various documents. He is also the archivist of the *Internattonal Centre for Rosmini Studiess* (Stresa). As an Archivist, and having in that Centre various writings of Magdalen of Canossa, he was able to confirm the contents of these three pamphlets: «I believe that the two pamphlets are copies of two distinct originals of the Foundress». (Letter dated 13 January, 1987, Prot. n. 211/87, A.C.R.).

PART ONE

**MAGDALENE OF CANOSSA  
AND  
THE ASPIRANTS**

**1. THE RELIGIOUS VOCATION ACCORDING  
TO THE MIND OF THE FOUNDRRESS**

Magdalene defines the vocation to her Institute of Charity as «*a great gift of God*».<sup>1</sup>

Through the action of the same Spirit, and at a distance of nearly two centuries, Vatican Council II would officially recognise every call to the life of religious consecration as «a divine gift»<sup>2</sup> to be jealously safeguarded and promoted according to the specific spirit of the founders who make up the secular heritage of the Church of Christ<sup>3</sup>.

If every gift comes from above,<sup>4</sup> it is more than ever true to say the same for the vocation to consecrated life.

The vocation of man has its roots in the heart of God and precedes its very manifestation and perception by man just as it precedes the very creation of the world itself.<sup>5</sup>

The God who calls is the same God who creates. He creates to call, and calls according to a mysterious plan of providence after having given the qualities and means necessary for the person to respond.

«In the plan of God every man is called to a certain development because every life is a vocation»<sup>6</sup> and this is written in the innermost depth of each person.

It is for man to respond to the invitation of the Creator and Lord, in the depth of his own conscience for an integral and harmonious development of all his potentials and for the realisation of the goal for which he has been created.<sup>7</sup>

All men are called through diverse ways to realize themselves fully and to participate in the happiness of God Himself.<sup>8</sup>

With the aim of leading them to attain this eternal happiness, God sent His Son into the world who in time fulfilled the salvific plan hidden for centuries.<sup>9</sup>

Through His Incarnation, Christ is present in the history of man to enrich him from within, to transform him with the breath of the Spirit and to lead him back reconciled with the Father.

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

<sup>2</sup> LG, 43.

<sup>3</sup> cf. C.C.L. can. 575. 576.

<sup>4</sup> James. 1:17

<sup>5</sup> A. Favale, *La vita come vocazione, in Vocazione combine e vocazioni specifiche*, LAS, Roma, 1981, p. 35. (cf. 2 Tm., 1, 9-10).

<sup>6</sup> PP, 15.

<sup>7</sup> cf. GS, 18

<sup>8</sup> cf. ibid, 21.

<sup>9</sup> Eph. 3:9.

In the Church, depository of the mission of Christ God chooses certain men to become his close collaborators for the plan of universal salvation.

All of Sacred History abounds with the many people God called, to be used in His hands as instruments of salvation for many others.

«In that case, the divine call becomes something unforeseeable which usually takes man by surprise, often uproots him from his environment and from his ordinary occupation, orders him to abandon all that he possesses and directs him to journey towards unfamiliar goals, trusting only in the help and promises of God».<sup>10</sup>

In the history of the Church hundreds of people have been called by God to be guided along the path to holiness and to collaborate with Christ through the action of the Holy Spirit with the aim of continuing the work of salvation in the world.<sup>11</sup>

Magdalene of Canossa, Foundress of the Sons and Daughters of Charity is one of these persons called by God to form a religious Family which, for nearly two centuries has developed in the womb of the Church and in fidelity to her, the mission God Himself has entrusted to her. The Institute is God's alone, she writes, «a work of His Mercy».<sup>12</sup>

In the preface to the Rules the Foundress thus expresses herself:

*«God who chooses always the weakest and most lowly instruments for confounding the wise and strong, wished Himself to start this holy Institute »*<sup>13</sup>

Magdalene writes again that the mediatrix for the realisation of this work is Mary the Virgin, who not only «has obtained it from the Lord, but has also led it this far».<sup>14</sup>

So that no one could attribute anything to herself, who is only an instrument in this work, but that everything be considered as a gift from heaven, she thus specifies to her daughters:

*«All that has been done up to now is her work (the Virgin Mary). Never make the mistake of believing that anyone else could have done anything.»*<sup>15</sup>

The Institute then is a gift, as is every person called to be a member of it

*«.the vocation is given gratuitously, thanks to the generosity of the Lord».*<sup>16</sup>

*«You have the duty»,* writes the Foundress again, *«of responding worthily to so big a grace».*<sup>17</sup>

Vocation is a choice of life which does not lose its dynamism, because each day must bring a deep and personal relationship with Christ. This is the final goal of the religious life.

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<sup>10</sup> A. Favale, o.c., p. 47.

<sup>11</sup> cf. C.D.C., can. 574, 2.

<sup>12</sup> M.d.C., P. 1a, p. 24

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 25

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p. 89

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 17.

«*God, the source and substance of holiness*»,<sup>18</sup> proposes His own sanctity to those whom He calls.<sup>19</sup>

It is an ideal of bewildering magnitude to which God calls all men, and some in particular during the course of history<sup>20</sup>; but He who calls is also He who inspires, guides, sustains and accomplishes what He has begun.<sup>21</sup>

In some circumstances however, one's «*unworthiness, weakness and ignorance*» should be acknowledged, writes Magdalene. One should confide in «*God alone*» and abandon oneself «*entirely to Him*».<sup>22</sup>

This interior disposition of absolute dependence on God disposes the spirit to recognise that everything we receive is from Him: life, vocation, perseverance, joy and the complete and everlasting happiness which goes beyond terrestrial existence which He promises even in the midst of the inevitable tribulations in this life.

To live this reality deeply and to express it in our lives is to have penetrated it in the essence of prayer; it means to relive the interior attitudes of Christ as He lived His relationship with the Father. It means to become visible instruments of His invisible presence in the world.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 24.

<sup>19</sup> Here the sanctity of Spirit (that of Jesus Christ) is asked.

<sup>20</sup> cf. LG, 43

<sup>21</sup> cf. Ibid

<sup>22</sup> M.d.C., R.s s R P. I, p. 24

## 2 THE COMMITMENTS OF THE INSTITUTE

Every Institute of consecrated life which is born of the impulse of the Holy Spirit through the work of a Founder is a divine gift entrusted to the Church by the Lord.<sup>1</sup>

Such a heritage should be faithfully safeguarded<sup>2</sup> and dynamically handed down in homage to the Benefactor and directed to the ends for which it has been given by the same Benefactor.

The Foundress, Magdalene of Canossa, asks of her daughters some commitments so that the Institute can conserve and hand down its own spirit: prayer, information, hospitality, witness towards a clear discernment for those newly called to the Institute.

### Prayer

If it is true that the call to consecrated life is a gift of God, and Magdalene is more than ever convinced of this, the first duty then is to ask light for discerning the one the Lord has elected according to the particular gift of the spirit of the Institute.

*«The heart of the creature is in the hands of the Lord»,<sup>3</sup>*

she writes to Durini who has urged her towards new apostolic ventures, and even the work, says Magdalene to her friend, are in proportion

*«...to the hands which Divine Providence gives us. »<sup>4</sup>*

The duty of prayer is recommended with insistence to all her correspondents and it is especially codified in the Rules handed down to her daughters in order that they may exercise discernment regarding vocations.

To all the Superiors who are responsible for accepting the young girls she recommends:

*«That the Superior should proceed with great caution and she should offer intense prayers before receiving anyone»<sup>5</sup>*

And in another passage:

*«The Superior... will make the whole community pray for the same intention.»<sup>6</sup>*

And

*«... the sisters who come to know about it should pray ardently to the Lord, that He will not allow anyone to enter whom He has not guided to this Institute».<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> cf. C.D.C., can. 573-575.

<sup>2</sup> cf. C.D.C., can. 578

<sup>3</sup> M.d.C. to Durini, 26 June 1818. Ep. I. p. 498.

<sup>4</sup> M.d.C. to Durini, 26 June 1818, Ep. 1, p. 498

<sup>5</sup> M.d.C. R.s.s., P. 1 a, p. 49

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

A human evaluation is not enough in the birth and maturation of a vocation, but it is necessary to discover with sufficient clarity if God truly calls.

Hence the insistent request for prayer on the part of Magdalene each time an application was made from a young girl who was desirous of entering her Institute.

In reply to the Superior of Milan who presented an angelic young girl Magdalene writes:

*«I am not denying that the young girl is an angel... but when the vocation is not clear and sure, we will only betray the girl and bring damage to the Institute... we will pray about it and then decide.»<sup>8</sup>*

With reference to another young girl desirous of becoming a religious, she writes:

*«Regarding the young girl - who wishes to join us, I... would ask you to pray much because only then can we be certain that God really wants her.»<sup>9</sup>*

Even if the young girls are recommended by people who are held in esteem, the ultimate answer must be revealed by God in response to insistent prayer.

*«Regarding the young girl who was presented by Rev. Fr. Provincial, I hope that she will be another angel, as she has been recommended by a person who is very holy. On the other hand I beg you, before you decide, pray hard and in particular have devotion to the Heart of Most Holy Mary.»<sup>10</sup>*

When a Superior, is pressed with a request for new foundations, she brings it to the attention of the Foundress, who replies:

*...we will continue to pray in union with one another and let us hope that the Lord of the harvest will send us labourers but only according to his heart.»<sup>11</sup>*

*«When the prayers for the specific intention (aspirants) conclude... I will be happy to give you a reply for the other good person who aspires to join us. I hope you will also help me with prayers... so that in both cases we will be doing the Divine Will.»<sup>12</sup>*

There is no hurry for acceptances; persevering prayer and time will reveal the Will of the Lord:

*«My dear Caroline, I assure you, and ask you to assure that good girl for me, that we will not fail to recommend her to the Lord. So that, as you say, God's Will in her may be accomplished. You can, if you have not yet done so present one of those booklets which I cherish dearly to the girl so that she can, in the meantime, study the Original<sup>13</sup> she has to imitate».<sup>14</sup>*

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<sup>8</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, 29 May 1819, Ep. III/1, pp. 301-302.

<sup>9</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, 13 May 1820, Ep. III/1, p. 362

<sup>10</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, 19 June 1820, Ep. III/1, p. 371.

<sup>11</sup> M.d.C., to Rosmini, 11 November 1820, EP. III/1, P. 391

<sup>12</sup> M.d.C., to Rosmini, 28 April 1821, Ep. III/1, P. 418

<sup>13</sup> Christ Crucified

<sup>14</sup> M.d.C., to Durini, 14 October 1813, EP. I P. 386.

And to the same friend of hers who recommends other young vocations:

*«...for the good daughters, whom I call «ours» for the potential they have... when you have the occasion, remember what I told you ...always try to strengthen them in their vocation through means of faith.»<sup>15</sup>*

*«...I pray you and all the good daughters wh desire to dedicate themselves to the service c the poor, to unite yourselves with me in th novena which I hope to do in honour of S. Charles. »<sup>16</sup>*

The niece of Durini's maid-servant wishes to enter the Institute. Magdalene expresses her satisfaction, but recommends, as always, to pray. Written again to Durini from Verona she thus expresses herself.

*«I am happy regarding all that you write about Checchina, and I think she would be useful here. In the meantime let us carry on a little longer and we will pray to the Lord to make it known to us what He wishes for the good young girl.»<sup>17</sup>*

When it is a question of examining a vocation thoroughly and of deciding, Magdalene always asks for prayers:

*«I am... in need of prayers for two aspirants whom I must see: One is at Vicenza and the other at Venice.»<sup>18</sup>*

*«Regarding Catherine's Sister, if God gives her to us and she resembles her sister, it will be a good gain but I recommend prayers. Ensure that she also prays hard to Holy Mary.»<sup>19</sup>*

Every decision fills her with trepidation:

*«...about the decision to accept that daughter, before you give a reply, pray...  
...I am always so fearful when accepting novices that I assure you I tremble.»<sup>20</sup>*

She not only asks for prayers, but also engages herself personally in prayer:

*«For the young girl from Bolgare I will pray and ask for prayers so that the Lord may reveal what must be done in accordance with His Most Holy Will for the good of the soul of the daughter and for the Institute».<sup>21</sup>*

And to the Superior of Trent:

*«...I waited before writing to you hoping to be able to give you a positive reply about that excellent daughter whom you wrote about before I left Verona. As I understand*

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<sup>15</sup> M.d.C., to Durini, 1 July 1815. Ep. I. p. 412

<sup>16</sup> M.d.C., to Durini, 15 October 1815, Ep. 1, p. 419.

<sup>17</sup> M.d.C., to Durini, 28 December 1816, Ep. I, p. 465.

<sup>18</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, 24 February 1818, Ep. III/1, p. 161.

<sup>19</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, 5 June 1821, Ep. III/1, p. 428.

<sup>20</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, 15 May 1821, Ep. III/1, p. 423.

<sup>21</sup> M.d.C., to Faccioli, 16 July 1823 Ep. III/5, p. 3429

*that the candidate is very good, the outcome it seems to me, should be to the Institute's advantage. I beg you to grant me more time for prayer and soon after the feast of the Sacred Heart I will give you a definite reply.»<sup>22</sup>*

*«...I will pray, unworthy though I am, and will seek to weigh everything before God and then give a reply... to please you I would like to be able to reply affirmatively at once, but it is easy to commit oneself; later it is difficult to go back on such matters, as I have experienced, and I assure you we need much more time. »<sup>23</sup>*

When some vocations, for various circumstances do not materialize Magdalene has no regrets.

*«God is the master of souls and wishes to Zeal them as He wills.»<sup>24</sup>*

To Rosmini <sup>25</sup>, who had indicated the probability of a cousin of hers having a vocation to the Institute, Magdalene replies:

*«this morning I sent a message to inform you good cousin... that she pray for the same intention, and you, too, pray much, for it seems to me... that she has many qualities for accomplishing a lot of good If God calls her, but she is also very talented so that she can do great harm if she were to stay in the Institute for some human reason and does not find herself happy.»<sup>26</sup>*

Magdalene's doubt is indicated in the expression «if God calls her» and after some months it was revealed to have some grounds:

*“Let me begin by informing you that I have received a letter from the good lady Catherin (your cousin), from which, if I understand clearly, she is not definite about coming. I would have liked to have her dearly but as she is not called I am very happy that the Lord has willed it this way. As I desire only that God's Will be done, I thank Him also for not allowing anyone to enter among us except those who will really be happy here.»<sup>27</sup>*

Regarding the vocation of another young girl Magdalene informs the Superior of Venice of thus grave doubts she has:

*«As for Bettina, my dear Daughter, we will continue to pray but already I doubt very much about her vocation.»<sup>28</sup>*

After sharing her doubts with the same Terragnoli and after personally meeting the young Venetian girl, Magdalene adds:

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<sup>22</sup> M.d.C., to Rosmini, 18 June 1811, Ep. III/1, p. 433

<sup>23</sup> M.d.C., to Rosmini, 19 December 1821, Ep. III/1, p. 458.

<sup>24</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. 1a, p. 139

<sup>25</sup> Margherita Rosmini, the sister of Antonio, theologian, founder of the Institute of Charity also known as Rosminians.

<sup>26</sup> M.d.C. to Rosmini 20th July 1823, Ep. III/1, p. 654.

<sup>27</sup> M.d.C. to Rosmini 15th December 1823, Ep. III/1, p. 737.

<sup>28</sup> M.d.C., to Terragnoli, 14 December 1823, Ep. III/1, p. 735.

*«From what I have seen and from what you have written to me I fully understand that Bettina needs to be very generous with God and if she cannot gain mastery over herself through prayer and through the practice of internal mortification, I greatly fear that she will not persevere in her vocation.»<sup>29</sup>*

Not only is the founding of the Institute attributed to the Holy Virgin but also the vocation of the young girls. The Superior advises her daughter to pray above all to the Mother of God:

*«Advise Bettina always to be generous with God and to overcome her self-love. She should pray always to Most Holy Virgin Mary to help her carry out the Will of God in her vocation.»<sup>30</sup>*

The Foundress especially practices a total abandonment to the will of the Lord:

*«Continue to pray for Bettina to do the Will of God and if the Lord does not send her to us I am sure He will open for her another way»<sup>31</sup>*

When Matilde Bunioli, who shared with Magdalene the preoccupations of the beginnings of the Institute,<sup>32</sup> could finally fulfill her dream of becoming a religious, Magdalene is happy and maintains that Bunioli is a gift of Most Holy Mary. She gives this news to Bragato:

*«Regarding the gift sent to us by our dear Mother, we truly have every new evidence to spur us on to work harder and without flinching when it is a matter of the Glory of God... I think He wants us to work in other places where they desire new foundations. Don't tell them this but make them pray much. In short, I believe that two companions are about to join us here in Milan and one at Venice. But we need about fifty who have true vocations. Be assured that I will not write to Matilde of this until she writes to me.»<sup>33</sup>*

In another letter sent to Terragnoli, she expresses her gratitude to the Lord for the request made by Margherita Rosmini to join the Institute.

*«I want to confide to you something that you can share only with dear Betta<sup>34</sup> and I know this will make you happy. Our friend Rosmini is asking to join us... thank the Lord and pray to Him to fulfill His mercies.»<sup>35</sup>*

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<sup>29</sup> M.d.C., to Terragnoli, 1 November 1823 Ep. III/1, p. 709.

<sup>30</sup> M.d.C., to Terragnoli, 26 November 1823 Ep. III/1, pp. 723-724.

<sup>31</sup> M.d.C., to Terragnoli, 24 January 1824, Ep. III/2, p. 789.

<sup>32</sup> Matilde Bunioli, was born and died at Verona (1765-1848). Magdalene writes of her: without this lady it would have been impossible for me to establish the Institute. She has been for me not only a companion but the soul of this work. (C.C. Brescia ni, Vita di Maddalena Marchesa di Canossa, tip. Vicentini, Verona, 1848, p. 73).

<sup>33</sup> M.d.C. to Bragato, 20 October 1819, Ep. III/1, p. 330.

<sup>34</sup> Elisabetta Mezzaroli, (1777-1844) of whom Canossa speaks often in her memoirs. As with the Foundress she was gifted with mystical experiences which both shared.

<sup>35</sup> M.d.C., to Terragnoli, 16 July 1824, Ep. III/2, pp. 900-901.

And to Rosmini's brother, Antonio, who personally accompanied her to Verona to the Convent of St. Joseph, Magdalene expresses her satisfaction:

*It is far more than satisfaction; I am filled with wonder at the news that your most won thy sister, the dear Lady Margherita, is going to join us... »<sup>36</sup>*

And she concludes the letter with a request for prayers for herself and for Margherita, so that the latter can continue in the Institute the Spiritual journey of her own sanctification

*«I ask your prayers that she will wish to continue in the same way and I ask help for me so that your sister can accomplish the work of her sanctification and that God may grant me His mercies »<sup>37</sup>*

Prayer must always precede, accompany and follow the young girls in their various phases of religious life:

*«...let us pray for those who want to join us. In fact, ask the entire community to offer three Communions for my intentions and then make preparation to receive Luigia Fioria, but only after the Communions»<sup>38</sup>*

*«...I beg you to offer the Communions regularly... for the novices who would like to be admitted.»<sup>39</sup>*

Even the disappearance of a vocation, because it is not in conformity with God's will, is accepted and believed to be a grace.

Magdalene allowed the Lord to prevail over her personal projects, praying and making others pray while waiting for God's Will to be revealed so that her Institute could be enlightened and guided prudently. From God and the Virgin she awaits the choice of the candidates:

*«The Lord will help us to receive candidates so that these will be able to help us with the harvest... I think that in all the houses we can begin to say nine «Glory be» every day... and «We fly to thy patronage»... so that the Lord may provide... and that He may send us the candidates. »<sup>40</sup>*

Prayer is the very breath of Magdalene and is the fruit of a radical and total dependence on Him who has in His hand the whole universe and in particular the Church, the Institute and every single person He called to it.

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<sup>36</sup> M.d.C., to A Rosmini, 8 October 1824, Ep. III/2, p. 957. Magdalene in those days was visiting the community of Milan

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 958

<sup>38</sup> M.d.C., to Bragato, 14 May 1828, Ep.III/4, p. 1927

<sup>39</sup> M.d.C., to Bragato, 21 October 1827, Ep.III/4, p. 1746.

<sup>40</sup> M.d.C., to Bragato, 29 January 1834, Ep.. III/5, pp. 3566-3567.

## Information

If the first task of the Institute is to pray to the Lord, so that He may «send workers for His harvest»<sup>41</sup>, objective and accurate information is no less important for an enlightened discernment.

Not only should the institute know the candidates before admitting them to the religious life but the young girls should also be informed as to the nature and spirit of the Institute.

*...about the young girls.*

The admission to a life of special consecration in every Institute passes through «an attentive care»<sup>42</sup> by the founder and by the successive superiors who represent her. They are expected to examine the quality of those who request to be admitted to the Institute: their intentions, attractions and circumstances which prompt them to choose that particular way of life, and then decide, as far as possible in the light of the Will of God as to their suitability.

This is a right of every Institute which the Church recognises and in fact demands as a precise duty.<sup>43</sup>

In accepting the young aspirants, Magdalene is very exacting. She thus writes in the Rules handed down to her daughters:

*«...there is perhaps no other Institute which requires a greater vigilance, caution and reservation as ours.»<sup>44</sup>*

The motive for this strict vigilance and caution may be that her Institution, while in many aspects anchored to the secular traditions of monasteries, nevertheless also opened up new forms of apostolate, having more direct contact with numerous and various categories of people.<sup>45</sup>

Perhaps for this reason, also before receiving an aspirant Magdalene demands not only the «*more accurate information*»<sup>46</sup> and «*minute details*»<sup>47</sup> but recommends a personal knowledge, plus direct and possibly more frequent contacts. The social contacts with each category of people necessitates for Magdalene not only that the decision be a convinced choice of life but that there also be a solid maturity. Magdalene trembles at the very thought that even a single young girl without a proper vocation should be accepted, for she writes:

*«...it is enough to have just one to ruin everything, especially in an Institute which of necessity has to have contacts with people Outside.»<sup>48</sup>*

She recommends to the Superior to seek «*...more substantial information and necessary advice.*»<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Mt. 9.38

<sup>42</sup> C.D.C., can. 642.

<sup>43</sup> cf. C.D.C., can. 641.

<sup>44</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 111.

<sup>45</sup> cf. M.d.C., R.s.s., P.1a, p. 125.

<sup>46</sup> M d.C., R.s.s., P. 1a, p. 126.

<sup>47</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, 24 February 1818, Ep. III/1.

<sup>48</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. 1a, p. 125

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

The first step for knowing the candidate is information from a distance. She writes to Terragnoli, Superior of the community at Venice, regarding the probable vocation of a young girl of that diocese:

*«Regarding the letter you sent, it is indeed true about the vocation of Bianchini. She has asked her Parish Priest to appeal strongly on her behalf for admittance. Today I am not going to give her any reply as I don't want to resolve the case by myself. I will first listen to the Superior<sup>50</sup> then I will send the reply to you and you can do me the favour of letting her have it».*<sup>51</sup>

*«Observe if this young girl is suitable<sup>52</sup> when she comes to you. Examine her vocation, her health, in fact everything about her that you can. Don't be afraid of this, but recommend yourself to Most Holy Mary and she will teach you».*<sup>53</sup>

*«Regarding the postulants, after you have made them pray for Brochetti, I would be most happy if you would examine her carefully. Let the Superior examine her, then, if everything is satisfactory you can accept her if you see fit. I well know your idea that I should see her first. But if you find her suitable I do not want the devil in the meantime to put obstacles in the way or mess it up».*<sup>54</sup>

And to the same Superior in another letter she writes:

*«I recommend that you examine carefully also the health of Damina Donati, who wishes to be accepted by us».*<sup>55</sup>

When for various circumstances she cannot effect a personal meeting, Magdalene requests an exchange of correspondence:

*“I will not fail to have prayers said especially for that excellent young girl who is your relative. The very fact that she shows some inclination to come to us is itself good. As I cannot meet her now, tell her to write to me freely. And I too, keeping the same confidence, will reply to her according to the light God grants».*<sup>56</sup>

Uncertain about why a young girl had not been accepted by the Salesians, she encourages the young girl to write to her with a view to receiving more accurate information:

*About Lady Giolia Ottolini, I like your idea of telling her to write to me about herself, her desires; in this way there will be time to work out the difficulties which exist in*

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<sup>50</sup> Superior: means Spiritual Director. Every community had one according to the ruling of the Church at that time.

<sup>51</sup> M.d.C., to Terragnoli, 5 November 1826, Ep. III/2, pp. 1520-21.

<sup>52</sup> from Telgate

<sup>53</sup> M.d.C., to Dabalà, 11 March 1825, Ep. III/2, pp. 1062-1063.

<sup>54</sup> M.d.C., to Bragato, 18 December 1833, Ep. III/5, p. 3518

<sup>55</sup> M.d.C., to Bragato, 29 November 1833, Ep. III/5, p. 3504.

<sup>56</sup> M.d.C., to Rosmini, 24 May 1823, Ep. III/1, p. 635.

*this case. In the meantime I would like you to try and speak to the Superior<sup>57</sup>, and at the same time... ask her on my behalf, to be so kind as to find out from the Salesian sisters the real motive as to why they did not accept her. Notwithstanding that she says she does not have the needed dowry to enter that Institute, I would like to know if there are other motives... As soon as you have the reply from the Superior, write to me for it will help me as a norm».<sup>58</sup>*

The direct rapport with the candidate to the religious life is the sure means preferred by Magdalene.

She writes to Terragnoli, Superior of Venice, who had suggested to her to accept a young girl:

*«Regarding the postulant, if I can come to the Exercises I will examine her in person and will accept her if I find her suitable. But if I cannot come so early, I will give you the task of receiving her, since I wouldn't want to lose a candidate because of the delay as she is very much needed in this house».<sup>59</sup>*

Thus she writes to Margaret Rosmini who is asking for a meeting with one of her cousins who is aspiring to religious life:

*«I beg you my dear friend, greet your good cousin Signora Caterina warmly for me and tell her at the same time that if nothing else happens, God willing, from the 18th-20th of this month I will be at Verona, where I can stop only for a short time... so it seems necessary that this good lady should go to Verona at that time where we can have the satisfaction of knowing one another personally».<sup>60</sup>*

To a priest of Padua who re-submitted the request of a young girl with whom Magdalene had lost touch. she thus writes:

*«I feel assured of the stability of the vocation of this daughter and I am well persuaded, that as her Director, you would know if she is really called by God This will become clearer to me as time goes on.*

*“In about three months I must go to Venice and passing by Padua I could briefly receive the above-mentioned aspirant... and thus personally could see for myself what is to be done».<sup>61</sup>*

The prudence with which Magdalene proceeds in accepting the candidate is clearly indicated in a letter addressed to Don Castellani, the Rector of a parish in the province of Verona, who had recommended his sister to be accepted by the Institute.

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<sup>57</sup> Mons. A. Traversi (1765-1842), Venetian priest, Archbishop of Nazianzo. From 17 June 1829 apiritual director of the community of Venice.

<sup>58</sup> M.d.C., to Terragnoli, 11 April 1829, EpIII/4, pp. 2118-2119.

<sup>59</sup> M.d.C. to Terragnoli, 16 May 1832, Ep. III/4, p. 3107.

<sup>60</sup> M.d.C. to Rosmini, 9 July 1823, Ep. III/I, p. 648. Catherine chose the Rosminians and died at Domodossola in 1858.

<sup>61</sup> M.d.C., to a priest (1826), EP. III/2, p. 1568.

*«I talked at various times with this very good daughter, in whom I seem to see the traces of a vocation to the religious life. As you know, more important than my contacts is to ascertain that it is God's will. I am sure you will also share my opinion that it is necessary to allow her good resolutions to mature».*<sup>62</sup>

Bernadina, as the young girl was called, shortly afterwards, decided on a different way of life.

Even if after a personal approach doubts remain about the evaluation of the person concerned, Magdalene delays the decision and asks for further information.

To Bernardi, Superior of Milan, she thus writes about a young girl who was previously engaged to be married:

*«About the young girl recommended by Don Angelo Molteni, inform yourself thoroughly, as we said before, about the marriage arrangements she went through. Find out her motive for having agreed previously; whether it was due to passion or really with the simple intention of choosing a state of life. Find out if there was any deceit and in short, get proper clarification. In those brief moments (when I met her) she seemed well-intended, active and having deep piety. She spoke to me with much indifference about the plans which had ended but it is better to coo thoroughly into everything».*<sup>63</sup>

There is no hesitation about accepting Margherita Rosmini when she writes to Magdalene to request for a direct experience of religious life in the convent of St. Joseph at Verona. The Foundress gives a quick reply:

*«With great satisfaction I reply immediately to your much appreciated letter, my dear friend I received it yesterday as soon as I arrived in Venice and noted that you would like to come and stay some days with me... my dear friend, I hope you will do so as soon as possible so that I may not be deprived of the chance of seeing you... I will not indulge in my hopes any longer, only let me repeat that you should come quickly for only yesterday they wrote from Milan saying that I am needed there in a hurry... so I await you soon».*<sup>64</sup>

In the prolific correspondence between Rosmini and Magdalene<sup>65</sup> names and evaluations of young girls who wished to join the Institute of the Daughters of Charity appear often.

From the writings of Magdalene we discover the esteem she had for her friend and later, dearest daughter. She often leaves it to her to discern and accept the candidate:

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<sup>62</sup> M.d.C.. to Don Castellani. 8 February 1828, EpIII/4. p. 1833.

<sup>63</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, 7 November 1817, Ep. III/I, pp. 131-132.

<sup>64</sup> M.d.C., to Rosmini, 20 July 1823, Ep. III/I, p. 654. Margherita (1794-1833) sister of Rosmini, entered the Institute of the Daughters of Charity in 1824. She was elected Superior of the community of Trent in 1828 and died at Verona where she spent last phase of her illness.

<sup>65</sup> M.d.C., had answered more than 140 letters of Margherita.

*“...I accept wholeheartedly that good person whom you have recommended to me. Please inform her that I have found it necessary to stay here until this foundation is well established and everything is proceeding smoothly. I hope this good daughter does not mind waiting such a long time, for according to me this will take some months. I hear that she prefers to be with me if she can come here. She can also come to Bergamo where I can receive her and after that she can go on to Verona with me and there she can stay for hor nnsitintv»<sup>66</sup>*

To her (Rosmini), she confides the method of accepting a young girl from Bergamo, who once trained, is to be sent to Trent:

*«Regarding the young girl from Bergamo, I would like to inform you that she has not yet joined us, even though she has had four years' trial to ascertain her vocation. I think it is better to give her another one. Let me tell you confidentially that I find this a little difficult as she was so joyful and grateful when she received the news that she could join us and her gratitude towards God was so great that though I did not show it exteriorly I was moved in a few days I hope to hear from her about the results of her reflections which I suggested to her. When she enters I will write and tell you everything, also about the things she needs to bring. Already, she should have everything. I don't know if I am deceiving myself but she seems to be a capable person».<sup>67</sup>*

Magdalene had known another girl when she was fifteen years old and as she could not recall much about her she writes:

*«...when she has had some experience and is quite sure of her vocation, listen to the opinion of Monsignor. Then if her material needs have been attended to, on my part I have no difficulty in accepting her for a trial period».<sup>68</sup>*

She also entrusts two other candidates to her for evaluation of their vocations and gives her approval for their acceptance:

*«Regarding that young postulant, once her vocation has been examined, if she is capable as I think she is... I would be happy to receive her for a trial period.»<sup>69</sup>  
«Regarding the postulant, after you have prayed and have made her pray, you can examine her. Then consult the superior<sup>70</sup> and accept her if you find her suitable for the Institute».<sup>71</sup>*

Through experience Magdalene knows the obstacles posed by families which interfere with the realization of a religious vocation. Though she understands the difficulty - she will not permit half measures .

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<sup>66</sup> M.d.C., to Rosmini, 12 July 1821, Ep. III/1, p. 435.

<sup>67</sup> M.d.C., to Rosmini, 20 November 1823, Ep. III/I, pp. 718-719.

<sup>68</sup> M d.C., to Rosmini, 2 September 1830, Ep. III/4, p. 2499.

<sup>69</sup> M.d.C., to Rosmini, 26 January 1831, Ep. III/4, p. 2687

<sup>70</sup> Mons. Eberle Giovan Pietro, Spiritual Father of the community of Trent.

<sup>71</sup> M.d.C., to Rosmini, 15 May 1832, Ep. III/4, p. 3104.

« *The strength of the vocation* » she writes « *should overcome everything* ». <sup>72</sup>

A young girl was again and again presented and recommended by her Rector but she was influenced greatly by the resistance of the family and Magdalene writes:

*«...the good young girl Bianchini... has lost a great chance though the goodness of the Lord provided her with everything (financially). Her father also contributed to make her lose this chance for he wanted her at home even though recommendations had been made on her behalf... The preferences of the girl are such that it is better for me to make sure before I receive her into the Institute... If she perseveres in her holy desires, I would want her to come to Venice to talk to me again and to present her case. Before I decide, let's see what effect the distancing of herself from her family will have on her. Then with the help of the Lord, we will decide (I hope) according to God 's will ».* <sup>73</sup>

And she concludes with motherly goodwill:

*«...if the Lord really calls her to join us, I will forget totally the past».* <sup>74</sup>

The Plan of the Institute provides for the acceptance not only of virgins but also of widows « *who have been tried by life and live piously* ». <sup>75</sup>

Magdalene has strong doubts about a young widow and communicates this to Bernardi so that she may take her time in evaluating her.

*«A widow of twenty years is someone we should think about seriously, and if the Salesians consider her more suited to an active life, we should give due consideration before accepting her. However, if she is very satisfactory,... continue to be gracious to her without becoming too involved.. You can always postpone the decision till my arrival as it is necessary... not to give her up... We need time and great skill. Be assured that God will give you the necessary enlightenment.*

She decides with certainty to accept a second widow recommended by another priest but always after having prayed, informed herself and received advice.

*«Signor Maria Minori talked to me when I was in Bergamo. Even then, she made Don Bernardo write twice on her behalf asking to be accepted into the Institute. I received a very good report of her from our dear Annunziata and my Teresa who had first prayed and sought advice. All this made me decide to accept her».* <sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, 24 February 1818, Ep. III/1, p. 161.

<sup>73</sup> M.d.C., to an Archpriest, 10 November 1826, Ep. III/2, p. 1526

<sup>74</sup> M.d.C.. Ep. I. p.. 550.

<sup>75</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, 1814, Ep. III/5, p. 3962.

<sup>76</sup> M.d.C., to the lawyer Gavazzeni, 12 March 1820, Ep. II/1, pp. 396-397.

As she does not have sufficient information about the same person she writes to Advocate Gavazzeni<sup>77</sup> who handles the affairs of the aspirant:

*«Maria Minori, besides having spoken with me in Bergamo, ...has written asking to be admitted to our Institute. After the excellent information I had about her and after having received advice I have decided to accept her.*

*«Our rules prescribe that we can receive widows but the Superiors should not admit them until they have settled their temporal affairs, disputes and differences with others which may prejudice the good name of religion. On the other hand, by sheer chance I happen to know that Lady Maria has a nephew who is contesting some of her inheritance. As the Rule prescribes I should know if this lady has settled her temporal affairs».*<sup>78</sup>

Owing to the limited financial standing at the start of the Institute, together with the information gathered about the candidate, Magdalene considered it necessary to enquire if the person had a modest means of maintaining herself at least for the period of the novitiate:

*«..about that young lady of whom Don Luca Passi<sup>79</sup> has,spoken to me, let me tell you, my dear daughter, that I can't diverge from what the Rules prescribe. If the girl... wishes to become a Daughter of Charity, it is necessary that before ascertaining her vocation, we also make sure that she has the means of maintaining herself during the three years of novitiate and that she has her dowry and her personal effects, otherwise I cannot receive her; and to know all this we need prayers, advice and enlightenment. So in such a case, before making arrangements to receive her, inform yourself of everything and write to me.»*<sup>80</sup>

*...to the young girls*

If it is the duty of the Institute to be informed about the candidates who are to join the religious Family, at the same time, it has also a duty and a responsibility to make known to the aspirant the spirit, nature and the aim of the Institute. Magdalene writes to the Superiors on this matter:

*«Let them not be attracted only by the real happiness of our state... but make sure they understand the responsibilities that they have to shoulder in the Institute and the spirit of Charity they must have to be able to persevere in it».*<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Lawyer Zaverio Gavazzeni, initiator of the foundation of the House of Bergamo. Per note biografiche cf. Ep. II/1, p. 375.

<sup>78</sup> M.d.C., to the lawyer. Gavazzeni, 12 March 1820, Ep. II/1, pp. 396-397.

<sup>79</sup> Count Luca Passi, Missionary and Founder of the religious Institute of S. Dorotea. For biographical note cf. Ep. II/1, p. 408.

<sup>80</sup> M.d.C., to Faccioli, 16 July 1828, Ep. III/1. D. 1977.

<sup>81</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. 1a, p. 69

*«It is important for me» she clarifies with her friend Durini, «that no one enter our Institute without having a good knowledge of it so that they do not have regrets later».*<sup>82</sup>

And in particular to Bernardi who has to deal with an aspirant:

*«...I am concerned that you should inform her about the nature of our Institute. Make her also aware that everyone is as happy as they appear to be and that we are not cloistered nuns like the Carthusians or Trappists, as people here in Bergamo falsely believe.»*<sup>83</sup>

A priest informs Magdalene that a young girl wishes to make an experience of religious life in her Institute. Magdalene with caution and prudence replies:

*«Reverend Father Luigi, I am sure you will agree with me that this is a delicate matter.*

*It has to be handled with great prudence so that the girl will not suffer in any way. The preference she has for our humble Institute makes me feel that on the whole she is well in formed »*<sup>84</sup>

And in another letter she gives further details:

*«...if this good young girl feels that the Lord is calling her to our Institute, in order to ensure that she responds with certainty and maturity, I think she should wait patiently a little longer. That is, until I return to Verona, although I don't know exactly when this will be. Reverend Father... if you don't mind I will write to you again.*

*If Lady Rosa is able to make a trip, I will have the pleasure of knowing her and the opportunity of informing her in detail about the Institute and what is necessary for entering it. If... for some reason or other we have to change plans, we will think of some way to give her the necessary information».*<sup>85</sup>

The Foundress writes to the Superior of Venice and suggests:

*«I must inform you my dear daughter, that soon a young Venetian girl will come to you who will ask to speak to you as sent by me. she knows something about our Institute and wishing to become a religious she wants to know something of our way of life, the Institute and also about finances. Perhaps she will come during the novena to the Holy Spirit but should she come earlier, tell her about everything; also about the interior life and spirit which will be expected of her».*<sup>86</sup>

Writing to the same person she suggests an answer to be forwarded to an aspirant who intends to follow one of her friends, already a religious in the Institute:

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<sup>82</sup> M.d.C., to Durini, 10 January 1826, Ep. I, p. 531.

<sup>83</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, 15 May 1821, Ep. III/I, p. 422.

<sup>84</sup> M.d.C., a Don Trevisani, October 1823, Ep. III/I, pp. 699-700.

<sup>85</sup> M.d.C., a Don Trevisani, 23 October 1823, Ep. III/I, pp. 698-699.

<sup>86</sup> M.d.C., to Terragnoli, 8 April 1826, Ep. III/2, p. 1353

*«Let me inform you that a young girl, by the name of Giovanna Novello, 26 years of age, will come to see you. From what I hear, this girl wishes to join our Institute... Inform her about everything that she needs to know... tell her that the novitiate is usually in Verona and about the spirit necessary for Religious life and that to live a happy life one enters to become a saint. Whatever our crosses may be they are trifles compared with the crosses endured in secular life. If one is not resolute about sanctifying oneself, every little trial or inconvenience will seem to weigh heavily».*<sup>87</sup>

To her friend Anna, who asks for advice about a young girl who wishes to know more about her Institute, Magdalene writes at length about the spirit that animates it Then she adds:

*«Regarding that young girl, I think she has been truly guided by the Lord. My dear friend, you well know our humble Institute and you can very well give a clear idea of it to this girl. I am only afraid that you will speak too well of us. ».*<sup>88</sup>

### **welcoming the young girls**

The right of young girls to know at first hand every aspect of the internal life of a consecrated religious community has made many Institutes today decide that it is necessary to welcome in their houses those aspirants who with full awareness wish to choose that particular type or style of life to which the Lord is calling them.

«Come and see»<sup>89</sup> was the invitation extended by Christ to those disciples who wanted to know the Master and the Messiah. Going to Him and remaining with Him<sup>90</sup> was the condition for the final choice of their state of life which in turn would make them his apostles, witnesses and martyrs of faith.

From the beginning the Institute follows this evangelical principle: to re-live the experience as did the first Daughters of Charity. Magdalene, in her day, did not accept aspirants into the community but gave them the possibility of knowing at first hand her Institute in two specific ways.

To some she offered the opportunity of the Spiritual Exercises which the Foundress herself conducted, or she gave them the possibility of attending a residential course which she organised annually at some communities of the Institute.

The course had the aim of preparing teachers who would be involved in apostolic work in their own places of origin but as the duration of the course lasted seven months it also helped the Foundress in an exceptional way to know the qualities of some of the young aspirants to the religious life.

A young girl, uncertain about the authenticity of her own vocation wanted assurance from Magdalene. Magdalene however, wished the girl to choose in complete freedom and conviction after a direct contact with the religious life. she thus replied to one of her letters:

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<sup>87</sup> M.d.C., to Terragnoli, 23 June 1830, EpIII/4, p. 2416.

<sup>88</sup> M.d.C., to Anna Oliveri Fanzago, 1826, Ep. III/2, p. 1566.

<sup>89</sup> Gv, 1, 39.

<sup>90</sup> Cf Ibid.

*«My concern for you is that before you make a positive choice, you should really know the Institute from close quarters and it should be without any obligation to enter it later».*<sup>91</sup>

And replying to the suggestion of the young girl to enter postulancy, Magdalene prudently continues:

*«It is true that the probation is a trial period and if you cannot adapt yourself, you can always leave. However I would like you to have a good knowledge of the Institute for yourself».*

And here is Magdalene's suggestion:

*«So, my dear daughter, let me propose what seems best. God willing, by autumn I hope to be in Bergamo... You can come to us for ten days to do your Spiritual Exercises. When I meet you then, I will try to inform you about everything you need to know; You need not even tell your people what your real intentions are»*<sup>92</sup>

The sister of the Prefect of Police in Trent would like to become a religious and she makes her request through the Superior of that city, Margherita Rosmini. Magdalene, respectful of the freedom of the young girl, replies:

*«I heard what you said about the sister of the Prefect of Police... If you believe that by contacts with us she can prepare herself, it might be possible as she is a Tirolese and has a natural intellectual aptitude and capacity to learn easily».*<sup>93</sup>

Sometimes the Course for teachers becomes for the girl, a means of experiencing the life of consecration and for the Institute it is a way of knowing the signs of an authentic vocation.

To the Superior of Bergamo she writes:

*“Wherever they may enter, here or in Bergamo, there should be an agreement whereby they will return to their homes after seven months. In this way they will be free and also the Institute will be free to do what it decides best».*<sup>94</sup>

The parish priest of Rovato, Don Tavecchi, negotiates over a period of time with Magdalene for a foundation in that city. He had already directed two good young girls to the Institute. A third young girl from an influential family was recommended as a future Daughter of Charity and as one who could contribute to the foundation at Rovato. Regarding this last girl, Magdalene writes to the parish priest:

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<sup>91</sup> M.d.C., to Margherita Caprini, July 1825, Ep. III/5, p. 4068. 92 IIs;A

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> M.d.C. to Rosmini, 27 December 1828, Ep. III/3, p. 2255. 94

<sup>94</sup> M.d.C. to Faccioli, 16 July 1829, Ep. III/3, p. 2163.

*«When this girl was in Bergamo to make the Spiritual Exercises it did not seem to the sisters that she had the suitable attitude and openness that is necessary to serve in the Institute».*<sup>95</sup>

Caught between the parish priest, waiting full of hope, and the not at all positive evaluation of the young girl who has been recommended, the Foundress continues:

*«...next January, here in Verona there will be a new training course for teachers. I suggest... if you think it would benefit her to train as a teacher... this step. she will be educated and will be trained in all that she does not know. Even if not the Religious life, this will in some way help her as at the end of the course there will be the retreat. When the girl returns home she can deliberate carefully about her state of life as she thinks best... If she is called to the celibate life then she can work for the good of Rovato».*<sup>96</sup>

And when a year is not sufficient for observing, Magdalene prolongs the entry into religious life suggesting to the young girl to dedicate herself to works of charity, assisting her daughters.

In January 1834, while writing to Msgr. Sardagna<sup>97</sup> with evident satisfaction of the entry of six candidates to the Institute», she speaks of a particular girl among them:

*“The one that does not have a dowry is the one greatly endowed by God. So I thought it best to include her with the others because of her capability in all the work of our Institute. We have already tried her out for many years during our SPiritual Exercises».*<sup>98</sup>

Isabella Ferrari whom Magdalene had met in Rimini and had brought with her to Verona in 1826 with the hope of preparing her for a future foundation of a house in Coriano<sup>99</sup> would remain waiting for her profession, owing to her very delicate health.

For the *«Lady of Rimini»*<sup>100</sup>, the Foundress was to have an exquisite and marked charity and would take care of her until her death with the everpresent hope of a special miraculous intervention of the Mother of God. One of the last wishes of the dying Foundress was about Isabella:

*“ I don't want Isabella to be sent home because of her poor health. This is in gratitude for the way the approval of the Rules was obtained and also I promised her that I would never send her back because of her poor health».*<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> M.d.C., a Don Tavecchi, 29 November 1833, Ep. II/2, p. 1041.

<sup>96</sup> M.d.C., a Don Tavecchi, 29 november 1833, Ep. II/2, p. 1041.

<sup>97</sup> Msgr. Carlo Emanuele Sardagna, Capitular Vicar of Trent, supported the foundation of a house of the Institution in that city. He was consecrated bishop of Cremona in 1830.

<sup>98</sup> M.d.C., a Mons. Sardagna, 11 January 1834, Ep. II/2, p. 1232.

<sup>99</sup> in Rimini.

<sup>100</sup> M.d.C., to Terragnoli, 29 October 1826, Ep. III/2, p. 1517.

<sup>101</sup> M d.C.. Last will, 9 April 1835, Ep. III/5, p. 4148.

The initial «Come and see» extended to the «Lady Ferrari» would be prolonged to last her entire life and even after the death of the Foundress.

This is an exception to the Rule which expresses the flexibility of the Foundress in treating every individual person with complete freedom of spirit and evangelical charity.

## Witnessing

The Christian is one who gives witness with his own life to the invisible presence of the Son of God, sent by the Father and working in every believer through His Spirit.

“God has sent into our hearts the Spirit of His Son»<sup>102</sup> Giving witness is manifesting the Spirit of Christ in us. Magdalene wants all her daughters «to be filled with the Spirit of the Lord»<sup>103</sup> so that they can

*«...animate all their actions and work with the Spirit of Christ and Christ Crucified».*<sup>104</sup>

who on the cross revealed the supreme sign of His Charity towards the Father and towards humanity. From the gradual and constant identification of the Spirit of the Crucified, the Daughter of Charity will reveal in her own life the virtues He practised on the cross: charity, humility, gentleness, love, meekness, zeal, strength, patience and every other virtue of Christ.

Writes Magdalene in the preface to the Rules:

*«...the Holiness of this Spirit is asked of you».*<sup>105</sup>

This profound communion with Jesus Christ is the indispensable condition for becoming docile instruments in the hands of the Lord and thus fruitful branches.<sup>106</sup>

*«...let them be persuaded of that great truth, that the good they do to their neighbours will be in proportion to the interior spirit... as it is the Divine grace that penetrates the heart. God usually grants His grace only to the words of those who love Him with a true heart and who are in intimate relationship with Him».*<sup>107</sup>

In the various apostolic «ministries» the Daughters of Charity should often renew and purify their intentions and conduct themselves.

*«...as people who are concerned only for God and His Glory».*<sup>108</sup>

The welcome given to both the girls and the youth in schools will be

*«...as though they welcome Jesus».*<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Gal. 4:4

<sup>103</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. 1a, p. 212; cf. p. 23

<sup>104</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>105</sup> *ibid.*, p. 24

<sup>106</sup> Cf. Jn. 15.5.

<sup>107</sup> M.d.C. U.R. p. 272.

<sup>108</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 149

<sup>109</sup> *ibid.*, p. 120

The instructions will be conducted with «*warmth and affection*»<sup>110</sup>. There does not exist an act of charity more perfect, writes Magdalene, as that of helping others to know and love God, and doing this in such a way that

*«...the faithful may be able to live a Life full of charity and love as the life of every Christian should be»*.<sup>111</sup>

Before visiting the sick the sisters will contemplate the love of Christ Crucified so as to renew and increase their faith and become aware within themselves «*...that they are going to visit the very person of Jesus Christ in those sick people*». <sup>112</sup>

Comfort and assistance to the dying will be more beneficial if «the sisters are in love with the Lord and with Heaven». <sup>113</sup>

And in all these works of Charity they will seek:

*«God alone, stripped of every affection and care for earthly things»*.<sup>114</sup>

With intense apostolic love they will strive to make God known and loved, showing «*many people the way to heaven*».

One of the more evident characteristics of Christian witness and also for Magdalene is the contentment which must manifest in the person and on the face of each Daughter of Charity.

They will show all the people with whom they come in contact, writes the Foundress,

*«...the great joy of being able to serve the Lord here on earth»* <sup>115</sup>

To Terragnoli, the Superior of the community of Venice, she writes:

*«Prepare yourself, so that when I come, I find all of you happy, but you especially; happy laughing and in good humour in the midst of your work »*<sup>116</sup>

And to the Superior of Bergamo:

*«Let only the contentment of your state and your happiness in serving the Lord be known, because my dear daughter, cheerfulness, equanimity, gentle ways, composure, courtesy and seeking nothing but God alone, brings more fruit than sermons at times»*.<sup>117</sup>

Regarding a young girl who had recently entered the convent, the Foundress says:

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<sup>110</sup> *ibid*, p. 144

<sup>111</sup> *ibid*, p. 148

<sup>112</sup> *ibid*, p. 163.

<sup>113</sup> *ibid*, p. 166.

<sup>114</sup> *ibid*, p. 73.

<sup>115</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. 1', p. 247.

<sup>116</sup> M.d.C., to Terragnoli, 18 April 1827 EpIII/4, p 1643.

<sup>117</sup> M.d.C., to Faccioli, 11 March 1829, ÉpIII/4, p. 2102.

*«If after sufficient probation I see that she is not happy, I will be the first to bring her back or write to her father to come and take her»,<sup>118</sup>*

Happiness in the service of God is for Magdalene the most convincing witness and revelation of the presence of the Lord in the Heart of his bride.

After having recommended that the Daughters of Charity should exclude from their lives «sadness and rough manners» she exhorts that, coming in contact with persons they should show

*«...their happiness even exteriorly, as the result of their service to God through whose mercy they have been called.. as there is nothing that gives a greater idea of the happiness there is in the Service of the Lord than in the contentment of those dedicated to His service».<sup>119</sup>*

Magdalene wishes her Daughters to serve the Lord in joy and those who are not satisfied with the choice they made should return to their families.

She writes from Bergamo to the Superior of Verona

*«May the Lord grant us the grace that whoever is unhappy returns to her home. I would rather have only three who are happy than a hundred who are hesitating».<sup>120</sup>*

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<sup>118</sup> M.d.C., to Dabalà, 29 April 1825, Ep. III/2, p. 1109.

<sup>119</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P.I<sup>^</sup>, p. 257.

<sup>120</sup> M.d.C., to Bragato, 5 April 1826, Ep. III/2, p. 1347

### 3. CRITERIA FOR ACCEPTANCE

The vocation to consecrated religious life is connected in a very significant way to the very existence of the person. It involves his entire being: will, freedom, feelings and all his strength.

Evaluating the origin and the maturing of a religious vocation is as important as it is difficult, both for the one who is called as well as for the Institute that welcomes the person.

To appraise the occasions which motivate a vocation and to discern a pseudo-vocation from an authentic vocation is the task of one who is not only gifted with a special natural ability but above all who has the gift of discernment from above.

Vocation is a gift from God: the initiative to call is from Him; it is He who sustains it along the path of life, and it is to Him that the person who is engaged in discernment should turn to for enlightenment.

Magdalene of Canossa was by nature endowed with the gift of discernment. To this natural gift was added another special gift of the Lord. Intimately united to her God she received from Him the light to read the future of the persons with whom she came in contact. The witnesses who confirm this gift are numerous.

One of her daughters<sup>1</sup> who testified at the process of the virtues of the Mother Foundress said:

*«While I was a novice, a certain Margherita who had asked me first about joining the Institute, later changed her mind about her vocation... She entered the Convent of the Dominicans in the same city. The Marchioness, who happened to be in Bergamo, said to the sisters who were lamenting the loss: Rest assured that in any case Margherita will end up becoming a Daughter of Charity- And true enough, after a year, she left the Dominicans for one month's trial before the robing ceremony. During this time, she changed her mind and by the end of that month she entered as a Daughter of Charity. At present, she is in a house in Bergamo».*<sup>2</sup>

Anna Rizzi, the secretary of the Foundress and later the Superior of the house of Verona, gives witness:

*«...my natural disposition was against a religious vocation... at a time when my teachers were going to punish me for my insolent ways, the Foundress touching me gently on my shoulder, said these words to the teachers:Forgive this young girl and be assured that she will join us and will become a Daughter of Charity».*<sup>3</sup>

In another text we read:

*«...I remember Anna Rizzi who often used to say about one of her nieces, Teresa Diana (1834-1872) then only an infant in her mother's arms, that Magdalene clearly affirmed one day she would become a religious in the Institute. In fact, she did become one».*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Carolina Messi (1811-1888) Joined the Institute in 1832.

<sup>2</sup> Positio super virtutibus Magdalenaе Marchionessaе De Canossa 1870 vol. 1, ms, pp. 334335, A 4, A.C.R

<sup>3</sup> Positio super virtutibus Magdalenaе Marchionessaе De Canossa tip. Pallotta, 1905, Roma, p. 302, A 4. A.C.R

<sup>4</sup> Positio super virtutibus Magdalenaе Marchionissaе De Canossa, tip. Pallotta, 1905, Roma, pp. 288-289, A 4, A.C.R.

Madre Luigia Grassi, a contemporary of the Foundress, relates how one of her co-religious was very upset about the conduct of one of the girls, a certain Esposito Angela. The Foundress comforted her saying:

*«Rest assured, that young girl will become a sister in our Institute».*

This came true when the girl was twenty years of age.<sup>5</sup>

Another significant incident which affirms the gift of discerning spirits which Magdalene had, is the following:

The Blessed Teresa Eustochio Verzeri,<sup>6</sup> in a personal meeting with Magdalene, revealed a certain anxiety about her own vocation.

To her, Magdalene said:

*«Remain free, and don't join any congregation for God wants you as the Foundress of a religious order».*<sup>7</sup>

The first *acompanions* of Magdalene, chosen and welcomed to the Institute by the Foundress herself were gifted by God with a special discernment of spirits. In fact, she herself, under the action of the Spirit chose the young girls who asked to be admitted to the Institute. But in the Rule of 1820 it was necessary to lay down the criteria for accepting the young girls who knocked at the door of her Institute to be admitted as Daughters of Charity.

For the gift of light from above which every Superior has to ask for before *«entering into any dealings for the reception»*,<sup>8</sup> the Foundress adds an entire treatise on this *«very important»*<sup>9</sup> topic.

For this reason,

*«...the Superior should have at heart the perpetuation of the true spirit of service of God in the Institute».*<sup>10</sup>

Such a task will be easy if she has clear in mind the criteria of choice proposed by the Foundress who, in spite of her gift of prevision, did not neglect any human means of appraisal.

She thus writes to Rosmini about a doubtful case of accepting a young girl:

*«You see how difficult it is to recognise a vocation and even more if you cannot speak to the person who is to be evaluated at least once».*<sup>11</sup>

The doubt arises, especially when some girls have the dowry but not good health. She writes to Bernardi:

*“The Postulants are many. Some have the dowry while others hope to have it in the near future. They have the goodwill to the extent that one girl wants us to put in writing that we*

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<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 305.

<sup>6</sup> B. Teresa Eustochio Verzeri (1801-1852) foundress of the Daughters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (Bergamo).

<sup>7</sup> *Positio*, o.c., p. 292.

<sup>8</sup> *M.d.C.*, U.R., p. 300

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.* p. 106

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.* p. 299

<sup>11</sup> *M.d.C.*, to Rosmini, 18 April 1831, Ep. III/4, p. 2764.

*will keep her in the Institute while she is in good health and if she should get sick, she will be sent to the hospital. There are some who have the dowry but as you know, I go slowly because I am very afraid».*<sup>12</sup>

Magdalene knew how to be a woman of decision and in the face of inconsistency and lack of generosity she would not waver:

*«Regarding dear Fulvia, I am not very happy with her continual inconsistency. She was reluctant to leave Milan and that I can understand, but when it is a question of a true vocation she should be ready for any place. First she was ready to leave at once had I accepted her. Now that she has been accepted she does not want to leave. I must say, that I am not fond of fickle people. If girls do not enter the Institute with the true spirit, better they remain in their own houses».*<sup>13</sup>

#### PERSONS WHO ARE REALLY CALLED BY GOD

Magdalene considers the choice of persons who intend to join the Institute of fundamental importance for her and for the Superiors who will succeed her in time.

Before dealing with the reception of any person the Superior should *ahave sure proof of the vocation»*<sup>14</sup>

In the chapter of the Rules which deal *«specifically and at full length»* with the reception of the aspirants<sup>15</sup> her recommendations are extended also to the assistants and all the sisters:

*«...they should try to obtain an increase of subjects who are really called».*<sup>16</sup>

Committing oneself to God is not a game and Magdalene knows it. About this she recommends to her daughters:

*«Whoever the Postulant be, the Sisters should not entice her by showing her only the real happiness of our state. On the contrary, although they must show their happiness, they should also make the postulants understand the difficulties they will meet in the Institute and the spirit of Charity with which they must be invested in order to persevere in it. In the meantime those Sisters who are aware of the matter will pray much and from the heart to the Lord so that He will not allow anyone to enter who is not being led by His call».*<sup>17</sup>

To Don Gabellini who suggested an amalgamation of those working in the Conservatory of Coriano with the Daughters of Charity, Magdalene cautiously emphasizes:

*«...make sure... that you prepare them and that they are really persuaded and happy. I tell you the truth, I don't make much of their wealth, their birth or other human consideration. What matters above all is the vocation and I am concerned about this more than anything else».*<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, 25 August 1820, Ep. III/1, p. 376.

<sup>13</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, 7 March 1818, Ep. III/1, p. 164

<sup>14</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 300.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, 106-112.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, 106.

<sup>17</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 107.

<sup>18</sup> M.d.C., to Don Gabellini, 5 February 1825, Ep. II/2, p. 1121.

To Bernardi, who is preoccupied about the consequences after some pupils of Treviglio and Milan who } had been sent home. she writes:

*«Don't be distressed... for the displeasure of those from Treviglio and Milan... if others do not come from Treviglio the Lord will send us persons from other places, for we know that the Lord can bring forth sons of Abraham from stones».*<sup>19</sup>

To her friend Durini, who encourages with spiritual guidance some «good girls» who wish to become religious sisters, Magdalene specifies:

*«...try to strengthen their vocation through means of faith».*<sup>20</sup>

And again to the same person:

*«...I recommend... that you encourage them and exhort them always to seek God alone».*<sup>21</sup>

Magdalene trusts in the Lord. He has in His hand the hearts of the young girls and if they are really called by Him they will not be lost:

*«...don't be afraid», she writes to Bernardi, «the vocations will surely come».*<sup>22</sup>

And again:

*«...when the Lord really calls He will do it efficaciously and if He does not do it at once, then He will do it in His own time».*<sup>23</sup>

Magdalene has learnt to walk in step with God:

*«Until God provides me with other candidates I will wait. This, my dear», she writes to her friend Durini, «is the main difficulty I find in this Work. Pious women are to be found in abundance, but real vocations are not easy to find».*<sup>24</sup>

She recommends «great caution» to the Superior of each community. The Superior has to

*«make sure that vocations are real ones and that there are no human motives for embracing this state».*<sup>25</sup>

The evaluation of the vocation should be strict, especially for those who might hide secondary motives for Personal interests:

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<sup>19</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, 24 June 1820, Ep. III/I, p. 372.

<sup>20</sup> M.d.C., to Durini, 1 July 1815, Ep. I, p. 412.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p. 414.

<sup>22</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, 24 February 1818, Ep. III/I, p. 157.

<sup>23</sup> M.d.C. to Bernardi, 25 May 1821, Ep. III/I, p. 425.

<sup>24</sup> M.d.C. to Durini, 22 November 1802, Ep. I, p. 160

<sup>25</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. 1a, p. 58.

*«The general Rule is that no one be accepted in the Institute who does not have a vocation. In all this the Sisters should not have the least regard for human interest as it is much better to live poorly or even as beggars, but in peace, in union of heart, and in observance of the Rule rather than to have wealth and disquiet, differences of opinion and the danger of losing the spirit of the Lord».*<sup>26</sup>

In the treatise «On the reception of novices» she writes addressing all the Superiors and Sisters:

*«First of all, the Superior, her Assistants and all the Sisters are enjoined and recommended not to allow themselves to be blinded by the foolish desire of growing in number. They should try to obtain from the Lord an increase of subjects who are really called».*<sup>27</sup>

And above all it is to be noted how Magdalene stresses quality rather than quantity. She maintains that it is absurd to have *«the desire to increase in number»*.<sup>28</sup>

After many years of experience of religious life, in the treatise on the receiving of novices she expresses herself thus:

*«Woe to that Superior who, out of human interests or for any other reason makes it easy to receive any Novices not really called. She would be responsible before God for all the spiritual and temporal harm that would be done to the Institute».*<sup>29</sup>

#### COMPATIBILITY WITH THE SPIRIT AND THE MISSION OF THE INSTITUTE

It is not enough for the young girl to be called by God. She needs to be carefully examined on her suitability to the type of Institute in which she wishes to consecrate her life to God.

*« This young girl», writes Magdalene, «was very good but she did not have the spirit of the Institute».*<sup>30</sup>

Among the various responsibilities Magdalene had to handle, the one that she considered most important, was the choosing of the vocations.<sup>31</sup>

On the one hand while she believes that God Himself will provide suitable candidates for the Institute, on the other she feels that it is a big risk on her part to allow the entry of *«those girls called by Him who are not suited to us»*<sup>32</sup>

*«Let us pray» she exhorts in another letter, «so that God may send us candidates who will have the spirit of the Institute and good health to be able to work».*<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *ibid*, p. 59.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid*, p. 106.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>29</sup> M.d.C.,U.R, P. 1<sup>^</sup>, p. 300

<sup>30</sup> *ibid*, p. 332

<sup>31</sup> *ibid*, p. 49

<sup>32</sup> M.d.C., to Terragnoli, 8 February 1825, Ep. III/2, p. 1047.

<sup>33</sup> M.d.C., to Terragnoli, 22 February 1833, Ep. III/5, p. 3310.

In this sentence, written two years before her death, Magdalene synthesizes the quality of a Canossian: spirit of the Institute and good health, love for God with all one's heart, mind and soul, to serve Christ in others with all the gifts He has given together with life itself.

The Foundress is just as clear and emphatic in defining the specific qualities of the young girls called to her Institute.

### Spirit of Charity

Above all, one general characteristic should distinguish the aspirant to the religious life of the Institute. Even before accepting a candidate, the Superior

*«...must be concerned about receiving real Sisters of Charity».*<sup>34</sup>

Charity is the first dowry every girl should bring to the Institute. It is the gift received from God the Father in baptism and every baptised person through the work of the Holy Spirit should grow and mature in the school of Christ Crucified, the «*Great Example*» whom Magdalene presents to each girl wishing to form part of the religious Family. The mistress «of novices» she writes «must try to *root well the Crucified Lord in the hearts of all of them*».<sup>35</sup>

«Charity» we read in the new Rule of life, in modern terms, is a synthesis of the spirit of the Institute. It is the vital nucleus of our charism.<sup>36</sup>

If the charism of the one who knocks at the *door* of the Institute is not compatible with the basic charism of Magdalene, the vocation runs the risk of coming to grief over the dichotomy between charism and personal identity. Thus writes the Foundress to Elena Bernardi, the Superior of Milan:

*«...when the vocation is not clear and definite we will only betray the girl, sadden dear Giovanna<sup>37</sup> and damage our Institute».*<sup>38</sup>

On another occasion, she writes to the same Superior about a novice who is not suitable for the Institute:

*«...the Ladies can say what they like, but... God save us from keeping even one girl who is not suitable for the Institute».*<sup>39</sup>

The charity drawn daily from Christ Crucified must be the life which animates the personal, community, and apostolic life of the Daughters of Charity.

For all those who want to follow her, Magdalene writes in the Rules: each one should be imbibed with the Spirit of Jesus Christ, who breathes only charity<sup>40</sup> and should strive gradually

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<sup>34</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 300

<sup>35</sup> *ibid*, 316.

<sup>36</sup> R.o.L., Canossian Daughters of Charity, Rome 1982, p. 16.

<sup>37</sup> Young Countess Mellerio (cf. Ep. 1, p. 623).

<sup>38</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, 29 May 1819, Ep. III/I, p. 302

<sup>39</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, 4 March 1820, Ep. III/I, p. 349.

<sup>40</sup> cf. M.d.C., R.s.s., P. 1<sup>^</sup>, p. 17. 41 *ibid*. D. 18.

for *holiness of that Spirit*», which she defines «*as gentleness, meekness, humility, a spirit of zeal and fortitude, a most loving, most generous and most patient spirit*». <sup>41</sup>

The postulant must be open to this high ideal at least in her desires.>

Beyond the emotional enthusiasm of the candidates, Magdalene looks for a deeply rooted charity in Christ and potential for receiving in increasing measure the love, which the «*Divine Example*» gives her daily from the cross, for all men and in particular the most needy.

From this fundamental disposition it will be possible to discover some concrete signs.

«*You must really try to discover*», writes Magdalene, in the young girls who are called, three great desires: that of «*giving oneself completely to the Lord*»<sup>42</sup> and in particular giving to Him «*one's own free will*»<sup>43</sup>, that of «*serving Him detached from everything*» and lastly

«*a strong desire to dedicate oneself to the service of one's neighbours*»,<sup>44</sup> everything is offered for others «*for the accomplishment of the Promises made to the sons of God*». <sup>45</sup>

### human maturity and uprightness

To these essential qualities Magdalene adds «*...many others*»<sup>46</sup> related to the specific talents of each person. Above all «*...an upright person*»<sup>47</sup>. She writes to Bragato:

«*As for the postulant who is short-sighted, I have no objection to receiving her if she has the necessary qualities. But I request you to inform yourself well if she is upright and has a true vocation for the works of our Institute*». <sup>48</sup>

And again:

«*I hope to bring with me a good girl of uprightness and excellent education*». <sup>49</sup>

To Bernardi she discloses her opinion about a young girl from Bergamo who wishes to join the Institute:

«*...I have had the opportunity of admiring the uprightness of Cattina<sup>50</sup> and witnessing some of her virtues<sup>50</sup> in various circumstances. I assure you, my dear daughter, she would be a suitable person for a house of ours. Also Don Giovannis<sup>51</sup>.. speaks very favourably of her and tells me that he has also heard good reports of her from others. He looks unassuming because of his humility but he has insight*». <sup>52</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>42</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 106

<sup>43</sup> ibid, p. 270

<sup>44</sup> ibid

<sup>45</sup> ibid, p. 260.

<sup>46</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, 12 May 1824, Ep. III/2, p. 859

<sup>47</sup> M.d.C., to Rosmini, September 1823, Ep. III/1, p. 674.

<sup>48</sup> 48 M.d.C.. to Bragato, 18 January 1834, Ep. III/5, p. 3555.

<sup>49</sup> 49M.d.C., to Bragato, 28 April 1819, Ep. III/1, p. 282.

<sup>50</sup> Cattina Carminati: for biographical notes see. Ep. III/1, p. 524.

<sup>51</sup> Don G. Zanetti: for biographical notes see Ep. II/1, p. 407.

<sup>52</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, 12 June 1822, Ep. III/1, p. 525.

Magdalene is very perplexed when faced with a young girl who is *snot intelligent*». She writes to Bragato:

*«...when you wrote saying that she is not very clever, I fear that she may not be steady. As I hear that her vocation is quite recent, and that she is not very bright, let us keep her under observation. However I would like you to observe her docility attentively as we also need talents for this foundation. I am not telling you to abandon thee case altogether, but would like you to know her thoroughly and try her out».*<sup>53</sup>

About another aspirant she writes to Faccioli:

*«...I know how good she is but I am sorry about her slow-wittedness»*<sup>54</sup>

### **a good temperament**

For Magdalene it is not enough if the candidate is intelligent, she also needs to have a good temperament. Again in writing to Bragato she says:

*«Teodora<sup>55</sup> is really a treasure and seems as though she has had ten years of religious life. She is upright<sup>56</sup>, not self-willed and has a temperament that makes her get on with everyone».*<sup>57</sup>

Regarding another young aspirant, Magdalene writes to Bernardi:

*«..when the vocation is certain... and the temperament is docile I have no difficulty».*<sup>58</sup>

Thus Magdalene synthesizes the moral qualities which must characterize the person who wishes to join the Institute:

*«The Rule», she writes, ...exacts a great spirit of obedience ...a character that loves harmony and peace, which through a special grace of God reigns in a particular way in our midst, a unity which brings us to that cheerfulness which makes the work of Charity easy».*<sup>59</sup>

To Don Luigi Trevisani<sup>60</sup> who recommends an aspirant to Magdalene she answers:

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<sup>53</sup> M.d.C., to Bragato, 18 December 1833, Ep. III/5, pp. 3518-3519.

<sup>54</sup> M.d.C., to Faccioli, 10 February 1829, Ep. III/1, p. 2085.

<sup>55</sup> Teodora Roggiam listed among the Daughters of Charity of the community of Bergamo on the canonical erection day of the House. (17/9/1820)

<sup>56</sup> To understand it see cf. Jn . 8 : 2 9, Lk 2 2 42 .

<sup>57</sup> M.d.C., to Bragato, 26 May 1819, Ep. III/1 p 296.

<sup>58</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, 12 July 1817, Ep. III/5, pp. 3982-3983.

<sup>59</sup> M.d.C., Ep. II/2, p. 1426

<sup>60</sup> Don L. Trevisani (1741-1821) professor of Rhetoric at the Seminary of Verona from 1772 to 1790, then Prefect of Studies until his death.

*«...above all, I hope whoever wishes to enter in our midst will have a peaceful character, one who is sweet and who breathes charity and unity».*<sup>61</sup>

The Foundress also gives important reasons why this should be:

*«I very much desire that they have temperaments that love unity and do not disturb peace, without which the Institute ...cannot progress and grow».*<sup>62</sup>

Peace is the highest good of the Institute and every daughter should preserve

*«an imperturbable stability of humour inside the House as in the exercise of the various branches of charity»<sup>63</sup>, eradicating within herself all her inclinations, her own will and every satisfaction of self-love, in order to have only God living in her».*<sup>64</sup>

To arrive at such spiritual heights, the Daughters of Charity should coriibat in particular against pride *«...which by its nature prevents the effusion of the Divine Mercies»;*<sup>65</sup> against anger which prevents... *«doing good to others»*<sup>66</sup>; against uncontrolled affection. They should live

*...«only for the love and honour of God.. searching for Him alone in every action »*<sup>67</sup>.

Without the above-mentioned *«moral qualities, the Institute would betray itself»*<sup>68</sup> if it were to receive candidates who are not suitable.

#### **Availability for the specific works of the Institute**

Another necessary criterion for discernment that the Foundress had was love for the poor and the desire to spend all one's life serving those who are in need.

In her instruction to the Delegation of Venice on the necessary qualities the persons wishing to teach as Daughters of Charity must have, Magdalene writes:

*« To be received by the Institute they must really love the poor and be ready to serve their interests. They should be capable of work, or at least capable of learning how to work».*<sup>69</sup>

The Foundress' apostolic plans are in favour of the poor:

*«... This Congregation is dedicated to the service for the poor» even when Charity which «embraces every category of persons» is directed «in some ways to the wealthy».*<sup>70</sup>

It is necessary therefore that

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<sup>61</sup> M.d.C., to don L. Trevisani, October 1823, Ep. III/1, p. 700.

<sup>62</sup> M.d.C., Ep. II/2, p. 1434.

<sup>63</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 264-265.

<sup>64</sup> *ibid*, p. 265

<sup>65</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 266.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid*, p. 267.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>68</sup> M.d.C., to Anna Fanzago, 1826, Ep. III/2, p. 1567.

<sup>69</sup> M.d.C., to Cesarea Regia Delegazione di Venezia, 3 April 1817, Ep. III/1, p. 84.

<sup>70</sup> M.d.C., Ep. II/2, p. 1425.

*«...all the dispositions, the methods and all the internal and external works» of the daughters have as their source «loving and intimate union with God so as to serve others for His sake alone...»<sup>71</sup>but only those most needing « teaching, catechetical instruction and assistance» .<sup>72</sup>*

The first poverty for Magdalene is ignorance, the root of every evil. For this she suggests instruction, and in particular religious instruction, as one of the most important and basic works of the Institute.

When the young girls show an inclination towards teaching, Magdalene is pleased and writes:

*«...regarding good Chirardi, I am happy to hear that she is a credit to her vocation, and I am éven more pleased to hear from Conte Canonico Tomini that she says the school is one of our important works... Let us implore the Lord that everything may work out as He wishes for her».*<sup>73</sup>

The disposition for teaching is one of the aptitudes most appreciated by the Foundress. She encourages and directs the young sisters who are working in the school environment, in the parish for Catechesis, or rendering spiritual assistance to those who suffer. In every Sapostolic activity the Daughter of Charity is to present herself and work as *«an educator of faith»*<sup>74</sup> and towards that end she must possess those gifts which are necessary for transmitting the evangelical message in an efficacious way to every type of person with whom she comes into contact.

Above all, writes Magdalene, it demands

*«...continual sacrifice of the whole person and a constant exercise of charity and Patience».*<sup>75</sup>

Anna Rizzi, a lively young girl from Venice who had asked to enter the Daughters of Charity but who had shown impatience for the boisterous and noisy behaviour of the girls, is invited to reflect seriously on her decision.

In fact, one day she said something which did not reflect the spirit of the Institute which was reported to the Marchioness. Writing to Terragnoli she insists that Anna be formed in the true spirit:

*«Listen to me, about good Annetta, my dear Daughter. You know how I wish that the Lord would call Annetta and I wish dearly that you show her care and kindness. At the same time, the first occasion you have, comment on the words she said: Chow can one stand it with all that noise? - And if you ever have the chance to speak to Father Emmanuel, tell him about it on my behalf so that he can help this good daughter who is active in our Institute, to reflect».*<sup>76</sup>

And to the same:

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<sup>71</sup> M.d.C., Ep. II/2, p. 1416.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> M.d.C., to Faccioli, 23 July 1830, Ep. III/4, p. 2467.

<sup>74</sup> R.o.L., 66, p. 49.

<sup>75</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 119.

<sup>76</sup> M.d.C., to-Terragnoli, 19 August 1827, EpIII/4, pp. 1713-1714.

*«I have in a special way insisted (with Father Emmanuel) that he make her take note of our active life, which is connected to the interior life. In certain moments the latter cannot be sustained as in certain school situations for example, during instructions for the young, during recreational activities, on Feast days and other such occasions. Make him understand that I have a double interest in this daughter, that she should have a true vocation and that she should enter with contentment».*<sup>77</sup>

To another aspirant who wishes to go to Averna to live a profound interior and retired life, she writes:

*«Don't fall in love with those bushes and grottos because we need to stay with the girls and search for the Lord in the works of Charity»*<sup>78</sup>

She writes with humour in another letter:

*«If you want to go... to Averna and return with the stigmata I will be happy as long as after that you are ready to work going from one place to another as St. Francis did».*<sup>79</sup>

For parish activities, she prefers that the young girls have «good spirit».  
She writes to Bernardi:

*«I am very pleased when they have a good spirit because then they are usually more active».*<sup>80</sup>

Speaking about another young girl who is on the point of joining the Institute, Magdalene says:

*«...she is full of charity, of talent and prudence, accustomed as she is to be the head of her family, not having a mother but only a Father, brothers and sisters. It is true that she has not yet experimented our type of life and that she speaks the dialect of Bergamo but she is accustomed to teaching in school, sometimes visits the sick, even prepares the girls for confession and teaches doctrine. In short, as she has been the head of her family she can easily handle work such as hospital work or anything else you have... anyway we will go ahead with her formation».*<sup>81</sup>

For many aspirants Magdalene is able to foresee their mission when they would be admitted to the Institute.

She writes to Monsignor Zoppi:

*“... am expecting new companions... there are five and among these two are of special interest to me. one is able to help me with the secretarial work and she also knows many*

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<sup>77</sup> M.d.C., to Terragnoli, 26 August 1827, EpIII/4, p. 1715

<sup>78</sup> M.d.C. to Renzi 30 April 1830, Ep. II/2, p. 1181.

<sup>79</sup> M.d.C. to Renzi 26 November 1830, Ep. II/2, p. 1186.

<sup>80</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, 5 May 1822, Ep. III/1, p. 516.

<sup>81</sup> M.d.C., to Terragnoli, 3 April 1824, Ep. III/2, pp. 835-836.

*languages which will be useful for hospital work. The other, I hear, is a person who could become a very good Superior. I recommend myself very much to your prayers».*<sup>82</sup>

Two in the group of aspirants are already recognised as potential Superiors:

*«I would like you to know that I am expecting many novices (aspirants) and among these, if the Lord permits all to succeed, two seem editable for becoming superiors...».*<sup>83</sup>

For another, she sees the work of doorkeeper as recitable:

*«I received with great pleasure the letter of good Celestina and will reply as soon as possible, as well as to that of Checchina. To tell you the truth I too think that the first one can be a doorkeeper».*<sup>84</sup>

### **health. a requisite for apostolic mission**

Another requisite requested by the Foundress is health, indispensable for an active and dynamic life as envisioned by her Institute.

She writes to Faccioli regarding some aspirants:

*«I recommend that they should be in good health ».*<sup>85</sup>

Writing about another aspirant she says:

*«...you would do well to try her out as regards her spirit as well as her health, because if she does not have all the qualities necessary, even the Superiors' efforts will not avail».*<sup>86</sup>

For a future teacher, Magdalene suggests postponing entry to the Institute for some years, with the expectation that the ailments of her throat might clear up:

*«I understood what you want to tell me about that young girl, who is good and certainly has a vocation. To tell you the truth, because of the weakness of her voice, she should work with prudence. It is better to postpone the entry for a year or so as she would be involved with work in the school and this tires the voice».*<sup>87</sup>

To another young girl eager to join her Institute the Foundress, after briefly presenting what is requested, adds:

*«I forgot to tell you that aside from the moral qualities, without which the girl would be unhappy and the Institute suffer if it received her, she should also enjoy good health».*<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> M.d.C. to Monsignor F. Zoppi, 31 May 1817, Ep. II/1, p. 269

<sup>83</sup> M.d.C. to Ghezzi, 9 June 1817, Ep. III/1, p. 93.

<sup>84</sup> M.d.C., to Durini, 9 September 1815, Ep. 1, p. 417.

<sup>85</sup> M.d.C., to Faccioli, 9 December 1833, Ep. III/5, p. 3512.

<sup>86</sup> M d C.. to Rosmini, 10 March 1821, Ep. III/1, p. 408.

<sup>87</sup>

<sup>88</sup> M.d.C., to Anna Fanzago, 1826, Ep. III/2, p. 1567.

Writing about a young girl who had suffered from an ailment which was not well diagnosed, Magdalene says to Faccioli:

*«If this young girls seems truly to have a vocation with us and if Don Giovanni Zanetti, the confessor of the house thinks she is suitable, and if she has the necessary dowry for the Institute, I would have no difficulty in accepting her on probation. What I would recommend is that you make sure about her health. Remember that if the illness she had in the cheek was a result of glandular swellings (scrofula) <sup>89</sup> on no account accept her, because we have had many experiences of similar cases. It is better not to get mixed up with more cases as these are diseases which lie dormant for a period and then re-appear. Get her to be seen by a good professor before she is received. If the Professor has any doubts about it being a tumor or scrofula we cannot accept her. In fact it is better that you get her to see the professor and write to me immediately with his diagnosis and I will reply by the return post as to whether you can accept her or not».*<sup>90</sup>

And to Bragato, Superior of the community of Trent she writes:

*«...you did well to examine Donati's health, because we do not have any need of sick persons».*<sup>91</sup>

When in doubt she suggests to the Superior to consult not one but two doctors:

*«Regarding Donati, I spoke to our old doctor and told him about what you knew. He was really surprised, not having heard about it. Later he told me that he had also experienced the same thing with his aunt and some other cases and since they do not suffer pain, we could receive her if the others in the convent are not prejudiced. We still have three years so we can wait and see. As the Superior also told the doctor that this girl has a dark complexion, he told her to ensure that she does not have any liver ailments. Anyway if you think that she is in good health you can also ask the opinion of another doctor as now we already know Canturani's. If the other doctor, Concini, is also of the same opinion as Canturani, I will certainly receive her».*<sup>92</sup>

**age**

Regarding the age, Magdalene affirms that she has not established any norm. she prefers however young girls to those who are advanced in age. To Lady Franceschini who asks for information, in the name of a priest from Brescia, she replies:

*«Regarding the priest who is so anxious to know, I will tell him that we have no precise norm in our Rules about age for reception of novices and so we have received quite young*

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<sup>89</sup> Cheek.

<sup>90</sup> M d.C., to Faccioli, 5 May 1832, Ep. III/4, p. 3092.

<sup>90</sup> M d.C., to Faccioli, 5 May 1832, Ep. III/4, p. 3092.

<sup>91</sup> M.d.C., to Bragato, 8 December 1833, Ep. III/5, p. 3507.

<sup>92</sup> M.d.C., to Bragato, 30 July 1834, Ep. III/5, pp. 3657-3658.

*girls and also received girls who are more mature. What is necessary is that they should have good health».*<sup>93</sup>

Magdalene asks Monsignor Zoppi to examine the vocation of an ex-Gesuatessa of Arona (another congregation) who asks to join the Daughters of Charity:

*«Elena tells me that she has written to you requesting that you examine the vocation of a lady, 43 years of age who was a Gesuatessa in Arona. I am very confident of your judgment and that you will weigh everything. Let me confide in you that I am in need of a person who is well-grounded in virtue and knows the community life well so that within a few years I can gain a Superior. I am a little hesitant about a person advanced in years and formed in another Institute entering again and perhaps not being able to adjust here. I will listen to your opinion very willinelv».*<sup>94</sup>

She writes to Margherita Rosmini:

*«Regarding that good elderly woman who wishes to enter our Institute, tell her my dear daughter without any scruples that at her advanced age it is not the case to embrace another kind of life. That I am sure she would not be able to adjust, so it is better for her to find support somewhere else because we cannot receive her».*<sup>95</sup>

To Faccioli, on the other hand, she gives instructions to receive a novice who is already advanced in age if she weighed all the positive points:

*«I must reply to you regarding that postulant who is 53 years old. Make sure that she is of a steady mind, otherwise at that age she cannot be trained. Make sure that she is in good health and explain everything carefully to her as she has been a tertiary in another Institute and tell her that we forbid beating the girls in school. If all the above requirements are met, then make arrangements with the relevant authorities to have the exchange and accept her»*<sup>96</sup>

Magdalene expresses her reservation about the widow presented by canonichessa. She puts Bernardi in charge of examining her case carefully.

*«We come now to Luigia from Brisa. The Canonichessa has written to me many times saying that she has excellent qualities and would be able to manage well. I tell you in confidence that I am afraid about the healthfactor as I learned from the hospital she suffers great stomach pains and has need of attention and all this is not according to our ways... she needs to go to bed after lunch; she is of a certain age and is a widow. She would have to start like a child in a double sense as her already-formed personality would have to be re-made.*

*In the meantime, in confidence and with discretion, try to find out more from her about her health. With skill try to see if you can make her understand that to be received she*

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<sup>93</sup> M.d.C.. toFranceschini. 14 March 1822. EP. II/1

<sup>94</sup> M.d.C.,to Mons. Zoppi, b August but/, ep. nil, pp. 274275.

<sup>95</sup> M d C, to Rosmini, 10 December 1830, Ep. III/4, p. 2620.

<sup>96</sup> MdC, to Faccioli, 11 October 1832, Ep. III/4, p. 3208.

would have to be obedient and dependent, on a younger superior ...and observe her expression and her reply».<sup>97</sup>

She thus replies to Elena Bernardi regarding a young girl of 16 years of age:

«About young Rosa, aged sixteen, whom you spoke of to me, ask the afore-mentioned person<sup>98</sup> to examine her carefully... because young girls with sure vocations give us a lot of work but when they are formed, we can get them to do as we want. The main thing is to ascertain about their vocation. When there is a true vocation and the temperament is docile I have no objection».<sup>99</sup>

These are the main requisites requested by the Foundress of the young aspirants. The selection is strict and this is also recommended by Monsignor Pacetti who writes to Canossa:

«I am happy that you are receiving candidates. Let me advise you to keep your eyes open. Just one girl who does not have the right spirit can cause a lot of disorder».<sup>100</sup>

Magdalene assures Monsignor Pacetti she is not opening too wide the doors to the aspirants. In fact she writes:

«...sometimes I have found ourselves with little means and yet we have to maintain them all».<sup>101</sup>

Don Luigi Trevisani, writing to the Marchioness, expresses surprise that no other person of the nobility of Verona had followed her:

«Your sisters grew to such a number I find it hard, when I think that none of the noble or middle class ladies from Verona, the Marchioness' own city, joined, but I am sure that the Lord will send many labourers to your garden in St. Joseph's».<sup>102</sup>

Magdalene replies to Don Luigi Trevisani with wisdom:

«Here the Lord has given me two other companions. One of these is the first widow to enter the Institute. By Divine Mercy she is one of the widows of St. Paul and the other is a virgin. The latter will enter, God willing, this February. I don't know if I presume too much, nevertheless I tell you that it seems to me that the Lord, who chooses people who are weak to manifest His glory, has given us the grace of wanting this Institute, in which He has placed us, to be a special imitation of the Lord Jesus Christ I don't think He will call to this Institute anyone but those who are poor, ignorant and lowly... He called one who was born a lady but who already had so many troubles as to counter-balance this fact, that she could serve as the head of all others».<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, 22 January 1819, Ep. III/1, p. 236.

<sup>98</sup> Mons. Francesco Maria Zoppi.

<sup>99</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, 12 July (1817) Ep. III/5, pp. 3982-3983.

<sup>100</sup> Mons. L. Pacetti, to Canossa, 11 dicembre 1815, Ep. II/1, p. 198.

<sup>101</sup> M.d.C., to Mons. L. Pacetti, (1815), Ep. II/1, p. 72.

<sup>102</sup> Don L. Trevisani, to M.d.C., 16 December 1815, Ep. II/1, p. 68, n. 4.

<sup>103</sup> M.d.C., to Don L. Trevisani, 23 December 1815, Ep. II/1, pp. 68-69.

#### 4. DIFFICULTIES FACED IN VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE

Difficulties are for Magdalene the sign of the presence of the Lord in the initial work which He Himself had entrusted to her. She faces them all with faith and with a good dose of humour, which she had by nature. She writes to Bernardi:

*«Every foundation brings with it its own difficulties in its own time».*<sup>1</sup>

She writes to Rosmini about the obstacles put forward at the entry of an aspirant to the Institute

*«I am not displeased that we have to overcome so many things to have Lucietta. It is a good sign. Pray to St. Joseph that if God wants her for us, to do that which is necessary...».*<sup>2</sup>

And for another aspirant:

*«My dear friend, in confidence let me tell you that from the letters of your good cousin I have confirmation of what you have written. That is, that the young girl is a great soul, for whom the Lord, certainly has His merciful plans. As much as she is able to love the Lord, she also has need of prayer because I expect, if the Lord calls her, the devil will be up to his mischief».*<sup>3</sup>

The Foundress is more than ever convinced that the obstacles come from the enemy:

*«The funny part is that the noon-day devil keeps watch everywhere when someone<sup>4</sup> wants to enter... I could tell you of half a dozen incidents, one better than the other!».*<sup>5</sup>

Also for Rosa Polli, who would assume important responsibilities of trust in the Institute, the obstacles to her entry seem insurmountable.

*«Regarding Polli, you know how dear to me her entry is, and to see the devil lose his battle. All the same, my dear daughter, I must regretfully tell you that we cannot bring damage to the Institute for the sake of just one. If her relatives demand such conditions whereby we have to have recourse to the Government, it is better that we do not accept her. Let us bring the matter to an end and keep from telling the girl anything that might cause her pain... I expect that they want us to take the girl and give them some form of maintenance. I feel more compassion than anything else seeing that it is the usual diabolic impediment of our novices».*<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, 25 August 1920, Ep. III/I, p. 376.

<sup>2</sup> M.d.C., to Rosmini, 5 November 1829, Ep. III/3, p. 2222.

<sup>3</sup> M.d.C., to Rosmini, 9 July 1823, Ep. III/I, p. 648.

<sup>4</sup> From the context we can conclude that they are simple aspirants

<sup>5</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, 24 February 1818, Ep. III/1, p. 157.

<sup>6</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, 17 November 1820, Ep. III/I, p. 393-394.

The delay in obtaining the Decree of approval for the Institute causes in some families a reluctance to allow their daughters to become religious, no small obstacle for the Foundress. But such an obstacle is nothing compared to the inevitable difficulties inherent in the approval of the Institute and with each new foundation:

*«Now, my dear daughter, I will reply to the paragraph in your letter which refers to dear Fulvia and the other two. In prayer before God, I experienced real consolation, feeling the serious difficulty in the vocation of the first, which was a little painful to me and I wished that things could have gone more smoothly and quietly. My dear daughter, these religious weigh rules carefully and we who have the vocation must weigh them with the same charity with which the Lord has dealt with us in every need of ours and in every circumstance. There has never been a new institution... without difficulties and.. no Institute could have been established if all the first members had based their decisions on the strength of the life of the person whom the Lord wished should start it».*<sup>7</sup>

At the moment when the young girls are about to leave their families the difficulties multiply. Through correspondence, she personally comforts an aspirant who is prevented from entering owing to the resistance on the part of her parents. Magdalene informs Monsignor Zoppi:

*«Poor Donna Elisabetta could not obtain anything from her father... He would neither listen to Count Durini to whom I had already referred, nor to me. He told his daughter that if the Government approved this Institute, he would come to know of it through the press and he also said other things which would be laughable were they not so painful to the daughter. I told Elena (Bernardi) to write to her to give some comfort and I will also write for I feel sorry for her».*<sup>8</sup>

She learns through Bernardi of the difficulties imposed by the families of the young girls on their decision to follow the idea of Magdalene:

*«Regarding Fulvia, tell me if her vocation has been made known to her father and if the bride has already entered the house. All these difficulties over a woman have come about now, and when I was in Milan it didn't seem as if they would. I am sorry for Laura too but doubt if she will encounter greater difficulties as she is the head of the household. If I can I will enclose a reply for Fortunata. For the girl referred to by the bishop's assistant, I would like to know where the difficulty comes from, whether from the confessor, or from the relatives who do not want to give the 11,000 liras, or from what».*<sup>9</sup>

To Monsignor Zoppi she communicates the difficulties which have risen for some aspirants:

*«Those good and clever young girls who were about to enter are facing incredible difficulties.*

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<sup>7</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, 31 January 1818, Ep. III/I, pp. 152-153.

<sup>8</sup> M.d.C. to Mons. Zoppi, 14 October 1817, Ep. II/I, p. 280

<sup>9</sup> M.d.C. to Bernardi, 28 February 1818, Ep. III/I, p. 161.

*One of them, about twenty years old, well-educated and capable... her father was so furious with me and really without reason, that he left, as the girl was not local, without even letting me see her... If I had not feared the pain the daughter might endure, it would have been amusing. Now most Holy Mary has quieted him though he is not totally persuaded But all the same there are innumerable obstacles».<sup>10</sup>*

A young girl is constrained to delay her entry into the Institute because of difficulties imposed by the relatives and by her spiritual director. Magdalene tries to smooth over the difficulties by giving the family indirect information about the aim, spirit and style of life of the members of the Institute. In the meantime, with faith and the heart of a mother, she consoles the young girl saying that she is prepared to help overcome the difficulties of inclement weather by offering her one of the most sunny rooms in the house of Verona. She writes:

*«...my dear Daughter, I don't want you to suffer any delay for which you are not responsible and which the Lord permits for His greater Glory. Be assured that you will be no less dear to me when you come, and don't let your health suffer. I don't know if your Confessor really knows what our weather is like; it is much less cold than theirs. As I think you might suffer from the cold, I would certainly settle you in one of the most sunny rooms».<sup>11</sup>*

Even the inclement weather can be a difficulty. Magdalene thus informs the Superior of Venice:

*«This morning we are waiting for our novice Ravelli (Marianna), but as it is snowing heavily, I am afraid that her mother might not let her come»<sup>12</sup>*

The pain of a mother for the sudden departure of a daughter from home is always something that gives rise to great respect and compassion. Magdalene, after writing about an aspirant who is on the point of leaving home, says:

*«...the second aspirant, who will be a surprise to you, is the daughter of the good doctor Ravelli. She is a very good young girl, of about twenty-two years of age. she is the only daughter and as you know she has a brother who is a religious. Pray to the Lord for both aspirants but especially for this lady. The continual weeping of her mother for the pain of parting from her daughter grieves the girl even though she is very happy to be joining us. Probably she will leave us in a few days but I am not yet certain of it».<sup>13</sup>*

Magdalene knows how to wait for the time to mature, even within the family, so as not to provoke useless psychic traumas which are difficult to cure.

*«I am reluctant» she writes, «to receive anyone **without** the permission of her parents».<sup>14</sup>*

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<sup>10</sup> M.d.C. to Mons. Zoppi, 28 June 1817, Ep. II/I, p. 273.

<sup>11</sup> M.d.C. to Faccioli, (January 1821), Ep. III/S, p. 4024.

<sup>12</sup> M.d.C. to Terragnoli, 12 January 1826, Ep. III/2, p. 1298

<sup>13</sup> M.d.C. to Terragnoli, 4 January 1826, Ep. III/2, p. 1290.

<sup>14</sup> M.d.C., to Bragato, 18 November 1830, Ep. III/4, p. 2582.

Rather than break the family ties which are of primary importance, she encourages the acceptance of the will of the Lord in Deace and with serenity:

*«...because of her family, Cattina cannot enter the Institute. The Lord willed that the Father should die... the eldest brother... within a short time... has deteriorated in health and with the departure of Cattina, the mother would be deprived of the necessary support. Her confessor and Don Luigi... sent her to consult two of the best theologians of this city<sup>15</sup>... Both are very much in favour of the Institute even though they do not know each other. They told her that in conscience she cannot abandon her mother, as she needs to give what she earns to her mother. I tell you, I admire the virtue of this good daughter, even though she is afflicted with so much suffering... However as the obstacle is there and comes directly from God, we must know that this is His Will. As the Lord does all things well, my dear daughter, who knows, although this daughter seems suitable for us, she may not be so. In short, I feel she will be happy, as I am, doing the Will of God.»<sup>16</sup>*

Even when a maid, an aspirant to the religious life has to wait for the consent of Countess Buri, whose service she is in, Magdalene knows how to wait with tranquility and remain full of lively humour:

*«I am pleased to have that dear Giustina, the Buri household's maid who has to arrange things with her mistress. One thing I read in her letter brought to mind something which made me laugh. Bertoldo, when he had to be hanged decided that they could hang him only when a suitable tree was found and so he was never hanged because a suitable tree was never found. Similarly I would not want Giustina's mistress to do the same. Already Giustina, whatever Buri's intention may be, will certainly come to us. I hope with Giustina we will have gained a "treasure"».<sup>17</sup>*

And after a few days, Magdalene says in a spirit of faith and understanding about the delay in giving the permission:

*«Regarding Giustina of the House of Buri, if she enters early, it can only be the result of her own prayers. Although Buri seems very well disposed, the fact is that she has to find another girl (maid) who can replace Giustina, and without a special grace this is going to take a long time. Cristina and I will not fail to pray to the Lord, so that He may do with Giustina as He wishes».<sup>18</sup>*

The complications continue for some of the aspirants. Magdalene clarifies for each one what she must do:

*«I write my dear daughter, about Maria Soar di's lady-in-waiting ...Maria has to come here<sup>19</sup> on the 23rd of this month».<sup>20</sup>*

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<sup>15</sup> Bergamo.

<sup>16</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, 29 June (1822), Ep. III/5, pp. 40354036.

<sup>17</sup> M.d.C., to Bragato, 15 August 1826, Ep. III/2, p. 1468.

<sup>18</sup> M.d.C., to Bragato, 23 August 1826, Ep. III/2, p. 1472.

<sup>19</sup> Verona.

<sup>20</sup> M.d.C., to Faccioli, 5 January 1834, Ep. III/5, p. 3539.

And as the main obstacle for the young girl is not the family but the Superior of the Third Order Dominicans, Magdalene herself writes to the General of the Dominicans. Regarding that decision she thus informs Faccioli:

*«...I will contact the Holy Father directly<sup>21</sup> and she and we will do what the General or the Holy Father says. I believe, however, that both will be very happy that she should come to us»<sup>22</sup>*

For another aspirant, she thus continues in the letter to Faccioli:

*«...encourage her without involving yourself and try to find out how capable she is, as there are negotiations under way for some foundations»<sup>23</sup>.  
“I have at heart, she continues, also my poor Nespoli,<sup>24</sup>. If you have the chance to see her, encourage her and tell her to pray to Mary Most Holy”<sup>25</sup>.*

But even when the aspirant has joined the Institute, the resistance of the family does not end:

*«We received a novice recently, about sixteen years of age. I assure you that she is a dove of innocence and seems to have special gifts<sup>26</sup>, Recommend her to the Lord because her people at home are making it difficult for her. Now that she is in, they regret having allowed her to colihé but I hope that Most Holy Mary will calm them».<sup>27</sup>*

Magdalene follows with motherly goodness those who have taken the definite step and asks to be excused because she was not able to reply promptly. She continues:

*«I think at last the Lord wants to reward your fidelity and constant perseverance in your resolution to serve Him and to be all His own. He has smoothed all the difficulties which seemed so great... my dear Daughter when God calls there is no difficulty, however great it may seem. that cannot be overcome”<sup>28</sup>.*

Always with the concern of a mother she encourages her to open her heart to the Lord who wanted her for Himself.

*«My great concern is that you have courage and that you should abandon yourself to the great charity of the Lord. I can imagine how you feel at this time, not having received any of my letters and perhaps believing that I am indifferent to you. It is not so, for one can see that the Lord wanted you to have a generous heart and to rely on Him alone».<sup>29</sup>*

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<sup>21</sup> Gregorio XVI.

<sup>22</sup> Md.C., to Faccioli, 5 January 1834, Ep. III/5, p. 3539.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Nespoli, (1809-1893) Superior of the community of Verona

<sup>25</sup> M.d.C., to Faccioli, 5 January 1834, Ep. III/5, p. 3539

<sup>26</sup> gift for prayer

<sup>27</sup> M.d.C., to Terragnoli, 6 July 1825, Ep. III/2, p. 1158.

<sup>28</sup> M.d.C., to B. Castellani, February 1828, Ep. III/S, p. 4109

<sup>29</sup> ibid, February 1828, p. 4110\*

## 5. THE PROBLEM OF «DOWRY» IN THE EARLY DAYS

The love for Christ present in the poor moved Magdalene to abandon Canossa Palace to live in the outskirts of the city of Verona, in the San Zeno district. It was the most notorious area and the most in need of assistance at all levels.

Her gesture had already attracted a following of other young girls who wished to dedicate their lives to works of charity in imitation of Christ who had preference for the poor.

Within a few years as it grew, the Institute extended to Venice, Milan, Bergamo and Trent. The requests for new houses were more numerous than those already established.

The maintenance of the girls who asked to join the Institute became a problem for the Foundress. How could she reconcile free apostolic service with the problem of maintaining the daughters?

To trust in Providence? It could be risky. To ask for government aid? That would tie her hands. To ask for alms from door to door? The Daughters of Charity should not think of anything but

*«the interest of Divine Glory»<sup>1</sup> in the continual exercise of the work of Charity<sup>2</sup>.*

After much prayer to discern the will of God on the method of carrying out the work and after reflection counsel and research. Magdalene decided to give to the Daughters of Charity some-security of life in the Institute by requiring a dowry from each candidate who entered.

*« The Daughters of Charity will live without burdening anyone, neither from the public nor from private individuals. They will bring with them a sum that amounts to a revenue of one fire (Milan currency) a day».<sup>3</sup>*

In 1818, when the Institute<sup>4</sup> was about to be recognised by ecclesiastical and civil authorities Magdalene specifies:

*“I did not intend this Institute to be supported by alms. For the benefit of the poor, my companions and I desire that we should be totally dedicated to the service of God and the State to help the poor without burdening either the Municipality or Treasury of the Realm».<sup>5</sup>*

In the Plan of the Institute which was to be forwarded to Rome and which was enclosed in a letter to her friend Durini, she writes regarding finance:

*«The Institute does not need a permanent endowment, but only a suitable place. The Daughters of Charity have always supported themselves... and they will continue this way*

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<sup>1</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. 1', p. 76

<sup>2</sup> Mdc.. R.s.s. P. 1^ p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> M.d.C., Ep. II/2, p. 1436.

<sup>4</sup> it refers to the Convents of St. Joseph and Fidenzio in Verona and that of St. Lucy at Venice.

<sup>5</sup> M.d.C., to R. Delegazione provinciale di Verona, Ep. III/1, p. 111

*and they will entrust the entire administration to their Superior who will take care of the needs of her house. What is left over will be spent for the benefit of the poor...».*<sup>6</sup>

Not only the maintenance of the members of the Institute but also the apostolic service must be free from obligations tying it to the State.

*«The spirit and the aim of the Institute is to render service gratuitously without distinction of persons unless it is to give greater care to the most needy».*<sup>7</sup>

How to render free apostolic service if the Daughters of Charity are not economically self-sufficient ?

- The poverty typical of every member of the Institute is that of *«living a perfectly communal life... receiving as Charity from the House everything they need».*<sup>8</sup>

In receiving the novices, Magdalene fixes at least in the beginning, a rule which is very flexible as to methods and time.

She writes:

*«Regarding the dowry, I will not have it prescribed by the Rule as a fixed sum because if the Congregation one day should have the means, this Rule might deprive some candidates who are truly suitable».*<sup>9</sup>

But faced with insurmountable financial difficulties the Foundress is constrained to rely temporarily on a specific norm:

*«...for the timebeing no postulants who are presently asking to enter or who will ask in the future, will be accepted who do not have their maintenance».*<sup>10</sup>

Magdalene specifies the reasons for this to a priest who had asked her to accept a young girl whose vocation was ascertained:

*we are dealing with an Institute that is just being established and is expanding, it is impossible for me to receive candidates who do not have the necessary means of maintenance».*<sup>11</sup>

That there were financial difficulties in the early days can be deduced from a letter she sent to the Superior of the community of Venice:

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<sup>6</sup> M.d.C., Piano dell'Istituto delle F.d.C., Ep. I, pp. 550-551

<sup>7</sup> M.d.C., R.d., p. 52.

<sup>8</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. 1<sup>^</sup>, p. 349

<sup>9</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. 2', p. 78.

<sup>10</sup> M.d.C., Piano dell'Istituto delle F.d.C., Ep. I, p. 551.

<sup>11</sup> M.d.C., to a priest, 1826, Ep. III/2 p. 1568.

a,..I do not forget the material means of maintenance and I am taking steps to ensure that there is enough bread and maize porridge for Venice and here (Verona)». <sup>12</sup>

Because of the financial straits in which she found herself, the Foundress aimed at receiving young girls whose vocations were not only ascertained but who could also manage a sufficient dowry.

With humour she tells Rosmini

«Certainly the first is more important than the second but also the body needs to eat». <sup>13</sup>

With the same humourous tone she writes to the Superior of Trent, who recommends an aspirant to religious life without the necessary financial means:

«Regarding the other poor novice, I understand completely but Homo sine pecunia imago mortis (the man without money is the image of death)». <sup>14</sup>

The real poverty of the first two decades of the Institute constrained Magdalene not to accept postulants who are «good but without means». She writes in a letter to Terragnoli:

...we have plenty of these candidates everywhere». <sup>15</sup>

And after having mentioned the two postulants in question, Magdalene concludes in a happy tone and trusting in Providence:

“My dear Daughter, I feel like laughing when I see... that I had already guessed about our postulants who do not have the means. Already you see, I am laughing and I have no doubt that if God wills, He will provide for them». <sup>16</sup>

Always in the theme of trusting God, she replies to Bernardi:

«Regarding that young girl whom the parish priest<sup>17</sup> wanted you to receive at once, find out if she has the means. Some time ago you wrote to me saying that one more or one less makes little difference, and this is very true but when they have the means I find it even truer than when they haven't. You told me last time when I was in Milan that you did not know how to make ends meet and now you are prepared to take a girl who has no means! I'm telling you all this as if you have not already told the Parish Priest that a dowry is necessary, I suggest you tell him everything now. If you did tell him and should he be of the opinion that we should accept the girl into the Institute in spite of our poverty, we should take the other circumstances more into consideration and then accept her with tranquility, trusting in the Lord». <sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> M.d.C., to Ghezzi, 9 June 1817, Ep III/1, p. 93.

<sup>13</sup> M.d.C., to Rosmini, 11 April 1829, EpIII/4, p. 2116.

<sup>14</sup> M.d.C., to Bragato, 4 November 1834, EP. III/5. p. 3732

<sup>15</sup> M.d.C., to Terragnoli, 20 March 1825? Ep. III/2, p. 1073.

<sup>16</sup> M.d.C., to Terragnoli Ep. III/2, 26 March 1825, p. 1078.

<sup>17</sup> Don Bernardino Burocco, for biographical notes see Ep. II/I, p. 302

<sup>18</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, 14 September 1825, Ep. III/2, p. 1201

She repeatedly brings it to the attention of th concerned with what is meant by «*the sum allotted*».

To a lady who in the name of a parish priest asked her about the expenditures incurred for one entering the novitiate, Magdalene replies:

*« The cost for the period of the novitiate, h lasts three years, is one Italian lira per day. When they enter, they will bring their own little bed, linen .and personal effects whatever they may be, which will be required for three years ...the small expense needed for the religious habit, the family will provide... As you know, our rooms are furnished with the bare minimum. At the most, I would suggest a cupboard in which to put the things they bring».*<sup>19</sup>

To Don Trevisani she specifies a contribution to be made — once only — after the novitiate, for maintenance for life:

*“After the novitiate, they will give the Institute a sum of 4,800 Italian liras for their subsequent maintenance, as the Institute is just formed e important are the moral qualiti h vocation and the ability of the girls. Í am trying to resolve the temporal cost in a way that will be less burdensome and more feasible for the one who enters, especially when the postulants are in restricted financial circumstances»*<sup>20</sup>

Providence often has a concrete way of manifesting itself. When the vocation is certain, Magdalene does not hesitate accepting assistance from friends and acquaintances in order to be able to receive aspirants who are financially deprived of means.

For Franceschina, Providence comes from Carlo Manziana, a rich merchant of Brescia who had helped Magdalene to establish a new house in his native town. Magdalene thanks the benefactor for his financial assistance:

*« The Lord will reward you for everything esteemed Mr. Carlo. There is no doubt that Franceschina will remember you before the Lord not only here but also when she is in heaven. You have earned for yourself a place in the Lord's House. I too am very happy to see that she has managed well and I hope she will become ever more suitable and be able to do great things for the Divine Glory».*<sup>21</sup>

For Tonina, Providence comes from Count Mellerio:

*«I hear... of the generous offering of the good Count Mellerio for Tonina<sup>22</sup> who will enter when he considers it opportune; give him my warm greetings»<sup>23</sup>*

And to Monsignor Zoppi she explains:

*“For the young girl for whom the honorable Count Mellerio will provide, please ax a date suitable for her entrance».*<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> M.d.C., to E. Franceschini, 14 March 1822, Ep. II/2, p. 952.

<sup>20</sup> M.d.C.. to Don L. Trevisani, October 1823, Ep. III/1, p. 7000.

<sup>21</sup> M.d.C., to Carlo Manziana, 27 June 1824, Ep. III/2, p. 882

<sup>22</sup> Tonina Lavagno, for biographical notes see. Ep. II/1, p. 341

<sup>23</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, July 1817, Ep. III/5, p. 3984.

<sup>24</sup> M.d.C., to Mons. F. Zoppi, 20 May 1817, Ep. II/I, p. 266.

Lady Visconti<sup>25</sup>, a Milanese noble woman, provides for young Catherine<sup>26</sup>. Magdalene appoints the Superior of Milan to give a report on her protégé.

*«...I thank you for the note from my good friend Visconti. Tell her that her little angel (as Mother Superior of Bergamo calls Caterina) does not need anything and that she continues to do well.»<sup>27</sup>*

About Anna Rizzi, who would assume important responsibilities in the Institute, Magdalene writes to Terragnoli:

*«...if the Lord does not provide us with the means I cannot receive her; more than anything else I am concerned about her vocation».*<sup>28</sup>

Enlightened by the Spirit of the Lord, she says of «good Annette» in a following letter:

*«...if God wills it He will open the way... I think that the Institute would gain by receiving her».*<sup>29</sup>

The Lord also provides for young Annette through more benefactors. Magdalene would receive donations but she would not ask for them.

*«You would like me to write to Lady Delfini» she writes to Terragnoli «but you know that I do not ask anything from anyone so I will not do so».*<sup>30</sup>

She proposes instead that the same Anna Rizzi should ask Lady Delfini. She concludes saying

*“... a little from one side and a little from the other and I hope we will be able to make it.»*<sup>31</sup>

Magdalene has strong trust in God. She lives in the conviction that

*«...when the Lord calls, truly He will provide».*<sup>32</sup>

She writes to the Superior of Milan about a young girl recommended by Monsignor Zanetti:

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<sup>25</sup> Luisa Castelli, married Count Carlo G. Visconti in 1784 and died in 1840.

<sup>26</sup> Caterina Commissoli, per note biografiche cf. Ep. IIV2, p. 1352

<sup>27</sup> M.d.C., to Faccioli, 13 May 1826, Ep. III/2, p. 1375.

<sup>28</sup> M.d.C., to Terragnoli, 19 August 1827, Ep. III/3, p. 1714.

<sup>29</sup> M.d.C., to Terragnoli, 2 September 1827, III/3, p. 1719.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, 25 May 1821, Ep. III/I, p. 425.

*«...my dear daughter, when I consider accepting a candidate there is not only the spirit but also the body to consider... Even if I cannot provide well at this moment, if the Lord wants this girl in our midst, He will certainly burnish the necessary means».*<sup>33</sup>

Magdalene knows *«that what is impossible with men is possible with God»*.<sup>34</sup>

Beseiged on all sides by requests for new foundations, Magdalene could have been tempted to welcome the young aspirants without excessive rigour.

She writes to Dabalà:

*«...so many are the requests for new foundations that I am in need of hundreds of daughters with vocations».*<sup>35</sup>

But the selection always remains precise and severe. Before accepting a foundation it is necessary that the maintenance of the young girls chosen and prepared by her previously, be assured in that place. For a prospective foundation in Turin, Massimo d'Azeglio gives the assurance. Magdalene writes to Durini:

*«Tell.. the Marquis of Azeglio that I would be prepared immediately to move to Turin to establish a new house there at his request. Everything necessary has been provided for and if he has well founded hopes of procuring aspirants with real vocations, those I would bring with me. To speed up things I would like to have not one, but two novices whom I would later take to the novitiate in Verona».*<sup>36</sup>

Regarding the maintenance of young aspirants Magdalene thus explains, as always through Durini:

*«...for a foundation of considerable importance, as that of Turin would be... it does not seem possible for me to bexin it with less than six candidates... when the two candidates from Piedmont come, not having four sisters who could be replaced from existing houses, it might be easier for Marquis d'Azeglio to find some more Piedmontese girls but they should be provided for (with dowry). if they cannot be found... it will be necessary to know how many candidates (from Turin) he could provide for in the future. In that case, we could accept those that I have with me. These are those whose vocations are not only ascertained but they are also capable and are really excellent, but without any dowry».*<sup>37</sup>

Again, through Durini, Magdalene sends the Marquis the «General Plan of the Institute» so he can be well informed of the aims and have an idea of the apostolic activities of her daughters. She also wants to assure him that maintenance of the novices will only be temporary:

*« bring to his attention that the Institute does not need a steady endowment but only maintenance for the time being... it will only be for this reason... ».*<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> M.d.C.. to Dabalà. 20 September 1826, Ep. III/2, p. 1492

<sup>34</sup> M.d.C., to Faccioli, 27 December 1831, EP. III/4, p. 2990

<sup>35</sup> M.d.C., to Dabalà, 10 February 1825, EP. III/2 p. 1049.

<sup>36</sup> M.d.C., to Durini. 25 agosto 1820. Ep. I. p. 513.

<sup>37</sup> without dowry.

<sup>38</sup> M d.C.. to Durini, 28 August 1820, EP. I, p. 515.

The plan for the foundation at Turin does not materialise however, as Durini and the Foundress did not meet due to a recurrence of the latter's illness.

Magdalene hopes to get maintenance for the four available candidates for the poverty stricken area of Massa Carrara from the nobility of Milan, but in vain.

She writes to Monsignor Zoppi who has been waiting for the Daughters of Charity for many years:

*«My intention is to see if I could obtain from these people here the daily maintenance of one Italian lira for four candidates which would have to be perpetual as I do not think it will be easy to find postulants, even in Massa, well provided for or anyone who would contribute partially to the dowry of girls who have nothing. I would like you to know, but please refrain from telling him, that I had a word with Count Mellerio, and I think he is inclined to help. If I can see Don Giolio Dugnani I will also try to ask him. Anyway before I leave for Milan, I will do the little I can. I am afraid I am not good at anything but I will trust in Most Holy Mary».*<sup>39</sup>

The requests for help would not bear fruit. In the meantime Magdalene prepared four teachers for the diocese of Massa in order to relieve the Bishop of any illusion he might have of her not being able to establish the desired foundation. Also regarding the request for establishing the foundation at Burano the most serious problem is that of finances. She writes to Cardinal Zurla<sup>40</sup>

*«Our foundation at Burano is under consideration and the reply from the Sovereign is awaited. I cannot tell you how much the excellent Prince viceroy and our most worthy Patriarch have done for this poor place».*<sup>41</sup>

And to Terragnoli, Superior of Venice, she writes with humour:

*«I recommend to you and beloved Beth our dear Burano. Tell me how many dozens of dowries both of you have found there. The novices do not lack anything when the common vice of eating has been attended to».*<sup>42</sup>

Even attempts «to give the Princess Erizzo<sup>43</sup> the honour of assisting in the foundation»<sup>44</sup> do not help the Daughters of Charity in Burano to start a community.

The entire financial burden for the foundation in Trent falls on Rosmini:

*«...it would have been dear to me»* she writes to Margherita, *«if the Lord would send candidates who have not only vocations but also the means so that the whole weight of having to provide does not fall on you, as I am not in a position to render temporal aid as I have given everything for the first houses. In the meantime we will also pray for this intention. ~oin me in abandoning everything to the most loving heart of Mary, our*

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<sup>39</sup> M.d.C., to Mons. Zoppi, 19 February 1825, Ep. II/2, pp. 1063-1064

<sup>40</sup> For biographical notes see M.d.C. Ep. 1, p. 527.

<sup>41</sup> M.d.C. to Card. P. Zurla, 7-8 July 1829, Ep. II/1, p. 650.

<sup>42</sup> M.d.C., to Terragnoli, 16 July 1824, Ep. III/2, p. 900.

<sup>43</sup> Noble Lady of Venice, for biographical notes see Ep. III/2, p. 976.

<sup>44</sup> M.d.C., to Terragnoli, 24 October 1824, Ep. III/2, p. 976.

*Mother, who will, I am sure, see to the establishment of this foundation, as she did to the others».*<sup>45</sup>

In the meantime, Magdalene secures vocations from Verona and from Bergamo:

*«On my part, if the Lord sends me a candidate I will keep her for Trent to spare you the new burden which you were ready to assume...».*<sup>46</sup>

The difficulty was to find suitable candidates and prepare them properly while waiting for the «much desired foundation».

*«...until I have new members and until they receive at least a little formation I don't know if I can establish new houses. At the moment, I am considering other houses and for these too we have tried to find members. We will have to exercise patience until they are formed a little. Then with God's help we can go ahead and start other houses».*<sup>47</sup>

Verona is the workshop for preparing the future apostles:

*« to speed up matters, I will accept your offer of that good and capable young girl of whom you spoke. She should bring at present either part of or all of her furniture and a small sum. However she can wait to claim her inheritance from her parents until it is opportune».*<sup>48</sup>

Another aspirant is to be accepted soon and she, too, will be prepared for the new house to be established in Trent:

*«I find her to have a first-rate vocation. She has a very steady character and pleasant manners as she had been well educated and I am told she is capable. I think she would be very suitable for Trent, which, as we said needs consideration and people who are educated and capable. However, if you think, it would speed up matters if in the meantime she received her training, I would be willing to receive her. Tell me freely what you desire".*<sup>49</sup>

Financially helped by the Rosmini family Magdalene was able to start the new house in Trent in 1828, nominating as Superior of that house her dearest friend Margherita who had already become her daughter.

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<sup>45</sup> M.d.C., to Rosmini, 5 September 1821, Ep. III/I, p. 439.

<sup>46</sup> M.d.C., to Rosmini, 14 August 1822, Ep. III/I, p. 551.

<sup>47</sup> M.d.C., to Rosmini, 11 November 1820, Ep. III/I, pp. 390-391. 49

<sup>48</sup> M.d.C., to Rosmini, 28 October 1823, Ep. III/I, p. 704.

<sup>49</sup> M.d.C., to Rosmini, September 1823, Ep. III/I, pp. 674-675.

PART TWO

MAGDALENE OF CANOSSA  
AND  
THE POSTULANTS

## 1. THE POSTULANCY ACCORDING TO MAGDALENE'S IDEAS

The period of postulancy is proposed and considered by the Foundress, Magdalene of Canossa, as a «*probation period*»<sup>1</sup>, with the aim of facilitating a gradual progress made by the young girl from the life of the world to that of the novitiate.

Thus we read in the relevant treatise on first formation and explained by Magdalene in a letter addressed to the Superior of Trent:

*“Very willingly, I will accept the two young girls whom you propose on probation... the probation will effectively reveal their vocation”.*<sup>2</sup>

In 1820 Magdalene had already written out the method of accepting young girls into the postulancy.

After having recommended to the Superior «*to make the whole community pray for this purpose*»<sup>3</sup> so that no one may be

*«blinded by the foolish desire of growing in number*<sup>4</sup> having obtained all the necessary information and advice<sup>5</sup> the Superior *must be extremely careful not to enter into any arrangements for the reception until she has certain proof of the vocation*»<sup>6</sup>.

A decade after establishing her Institute Magdalene becomes extremely cautious in admitting, even on probation, anyone asking to join her Institute.

The Superior should not only seek the advice of her assistants but have the community's evaluation on the young sister through their consultative vote:

*«The Superior... will propose her to the Chapter for the balloting. If the positive votes amount even to only one more than half of the number, the Novice will be received on probation, being advised that when she enters she must bring her Baptism and Confirmation certificates with her».*<sup>7</sup>

Only then, can the young girl be *received as a Sister*.<sup>8</sup>

The primary aim of this period of probation is to give time for the Sister to grow in her personal response made in faith to the call of God.

The Postulant must measure herself against others regarding the attitudes and dispositions requested in this new type of life chosen by her.

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<sup>1</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. 1', p. 137.

<sup>2</sup> M.d.C., to Rosmini, 21 March 1821, Ep. III/I, p. 412.

<sup>3</sup> M.d.C., U.R., P. 1^, p. 108.

<sup>4</sup> U.R., p. 106.

<sup>5</sup> U.R., p. 108.

<sup>6</sup> M.d.C., U.R., P- 3-000

<sup>7</sup> U.R., p. 108.

<sup>8</sup> Ivi, p. 125.

She must also know her own capabilities of making the interior spiritual, charismatic, communitarian, and apostolic progress requested by the Institute. The time established for this evaluation, writes the Foundress,

*«...cannot be less than six months».*<sup>9</sup>

Such a statement, while it checks every hasty and doubtful move of the young girls from one phase to another during the formation period, keeps open the possibility of prolonging the postulancy beyond six months, if the rhythm of human and Christian growth of the young postulant requires it. We can read in the *Rules of the Novitiate*:

*«The probation period will be six months for all. It can be prolonged should the Superior and her assistants consider it advantageous for the spiritual good of the person in formation and for that of the Institute».*<sup>10</sup>

If, the Foundress explains,

*«...in spite of all the care and attention given, her choice was wrong, she should dismiss the Novice concerned without hesitation, thus preserving the Institute in its own spirit and integrity».*<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> U.R., p. 108.

<sup>10</sup> M.d.C., Regole del Noviziato, ms., p. 5; A3, IX, A.C.R.

<sup>11</sup> M.d.C., U R. P. 1. p. 126.

## 2. CRITERIA AND METHOD FOR ADMISSION TO POSTULANCY

Regarding the reception of the aspirants Magdalene proceeds and desires that every Superior proceed in future «*with great caution*»<sup>1</sup>.

And while she does not make a distinction of social classes, she specifies with clarity the categories of people who can be admitted and those who for particular moral or juridical situations cannot be received into religious life.

As far as evangelical principles for admission are concerned she writes:

*“... as the aim of this Institute is the imitation of Jesus Christ, the one who deigned to accept among His disciples all classes of people, so the Sisters in accepting the Novices<sup>2</sup> should not have regard as to origin, country or social standing. This is because they are Daughters of Charity and charity does not make distinctions between persons».*<sup>3</sup>

After stating this principle, inspired by the heart of Christ, Magdalene, in Wine with the ruling in force at that time in the Church, enumerates people who can or cannot be admitted to the Institute. Thus we read in the unabridged rules of Milan<sup>4</sup>

*“Besides virgins, also widows are admitted to the Institute. In this latter case, however, double caution is necessary to make sure that their conduct and way of life have been consistently good. Even in their own families they must really give proof of loving their actual state and that they have sincere desire of giving themselves entirely to the Lord by living already that sober and holy life of which St. Paul speaks, so that one recognises in their speech and way of life that they really desire nothing else but the attainment of the Blessed Hope promised to the Children of God».*<sup>5</sup>

In the «Memoirs» Magdalene explains the moral and spiritual qualities of a widow she had accepted in the Institute and who died six months after joining.

*«During this time the Lord wanted to take to Himself one of the companions for whom I was not able to ask for the grace of good health. She was a widow and had been in the Institute only six months but was already holy. She was a person of deep interior spirit, of recollection and perfect obedience. She had the natural inclination of always wanting to talk about God... and it was easy to deduce from her words her very thoughts which were also centered on God. She had great charity towards God and others. and whoever knew*

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<sup>1</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 58.

<sup>2</sup> Magdalen sometimes uses the word «novitiate- to mean «postulancy», intending thereby to include the whole period of first formation.

<sup>3</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 58.

<sup>4</sup> Approved by the Bishop of Milan in 1820. In the Rules of Venice which date from 1812 the chapter on «Receiving the Novices» is missing completely.

<sup>5</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 106.

*her during her last days could see a great restraint of her own passions, so much so that she did not even feel repugnance in performing certain acts of virtue and mortification”.*<sup>6</sup>

To these moral qualities, indispensable for «*the security, reputation and peace of an Institute which is totally dedicated to the upbringing and education of the young*»<sup>7</sup>, Magdalene adds in the Rules, requisites of a juridical nature:

*«Besides all this, no widow should be received unless she has concluded all her temporal affairs so that after entering, her only care is that of serving God. In this way the House will not be troubled and concerned about temporal affairs which upset the tranquility of religious Houses and often darken their good name without reason».*<sup>8</sup>

Every Superior must have «*at heart*» the responsibility of maintaining and continuing without change the spirit of the Institute.<sup>9</sup>

With this aim Magdalene lists a series of people who are not on any account to be accepted into the Institute. In the Rule She writes:

*« The types of persons who must not be received on any account are:  
— Those who have not reached the legal age and wish to enter without the consent of their parents or Superiors.  
— Those who have a husband, even if he gives his consent to it or if they have been abandoned by him or divorced even ecclesiastically. — Those with incurable diseases. — Re formed Penitents».*<sup>10</sup>

Continuing she explains:

*«The general Rule is that in the House of the Institute no one be accepted without a vocation or who merely wishes to join the Institute with the idea of retirin& or the like. In all this the Sisters should not have the least reeard for human interest...».*<sup>11</sup>

The Rule which since 1818 had received formal approval from the Bishops of the local Churches of Venice and Verona and two years later from that of Milan, was for Magdalene a defence against the pressures of ladies desiring to retire temporarily or permanently in some House of the Institute.

Magdalene thus writes to her friend Anna Olivari<sup>12</sup>:

*«After my return to Bergamo I was asked if I could receive here among us Countess Zucchi who wished to have an apartment in which to live with two of her maids.*

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<sup>6</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. Ia, p. 374.

<sup>7</sup> M.d.C., Piano dell'Istituto delle F.d.C., Ep. 1, p. 550

<sup>8</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p- 107

<sup>9</sup> cf. Ivi, p. 125, n. 19.

<sup>10</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 59.

<sup>11</sup> U.R., p. 59.

<sup>12</sup> Anna Olivari, wife of Francesco Fanzago, professor at the University of Padua. (cf. Ep. II/2, p. 1377)

*I heard that she wanted to leave us her inheritance and in return wished to be conveniently maintained. I told her the truth, that according to our Rules we cannot accept anyone in retirement in return for compensation to our advantage».*<sup>13</sup>

The principle of not accepting «*in the Houses of the Institute anyone who does not have a vocation*» is expressed clearly in the Rules of the Daughter of Charity and the Foundress explains the motivation:

*«It is far better, she writes, «to live in poverty and even destitution, but in peace, union of spirit and observing the rules than to have wealth and be restless, in disagreement and with the danger of losing the spirit of the Lord».*<sup>14</sup>

To preserve and to grow in the Spirit of the Lord within the Institute is Magdalene's first aim.

When she recognises that spirit in the young girls who ask to join and become part of her religious Family, she gives news about this but always with a prudent discernment:

*«...I have seen up to now, here in Milan, four young girls who are asking to join. Two of these are very much to my liking, one fairly so and the other not at all, so I have sent her away».*<sup>15</sup>

And from Verona she writes to Terragnoli with evident satisfaction:

*«We have two other aspirants from Verona... I am not mentioning their names this time, because their own families want this to be kept a secret. When I write telling you who they are you will be astounded».*<sup>16</sup>

After a few days she writes to the same person:

*«This time I want to tell you the secret...».*<sup>17</sup>

and she names the two young girls who are about to enter the religious life. The news is also given to the Superior of Milan:

*«I want to tell you... something comforting... soon we will accept a novice whom I never expected to come and who will be a great surprise to You»*<sup>18</sup>

Also the Superior of Bergamo rejoiced with her over such a happy surprise.

*«Today... I am waiting for a Veronese novice and I think you will be surprised to hear that she is the daughter of our Doctor Ravelli».*<sup>19</sup> *She is the only daughter and has only one*

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<sup>13</sup> M.d.C., ad Anna Olivari Fanzago, 28 January 1828, Ep. II/2, p. 1389.

<sup>14</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. 1&, p. 50.

<sup>15</sup> M.d.C., to Ghezzi, 26 September 1817, Ep. III/1, p. 121.

<sup>16</sup> M.d.C., to Terragnoli, 28 December 1825" Ep. III/2, p. 1285.

<sup>17</sup> M.d.C., to Terragnoli, 4 January 1826, Ep. III/2, p. 1290.

<sup>18</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, 4 January 1826, Ep. III/2, p. 1288.

<sup>19</sup> Marianna Ravelli, for biographical notes Ep. III/2, p. 1288

*brother who is a religious. She is an angel of good moral standing, and a young girl of twenty-two years. In a few days' time another Veronese will also join us. Console yourself that even the Veronese after standing on the side-lines for so long are now waking up. Please pray for both of these... to the Lord.*"<sup>20</sup>

Again from Bergamo to the Superior of Venice:

*«In these days, I think we will be receiving a novice and my plan is to stay here this week and the next»*.<sup>21</sup>

It is evident that the aim of her delay at Bergamo is to welcome the new postulants personally.

Magdalene is not in a hurry to increase the number of her daughters. Even if the young girls have exceptional qualities, sometimes she decides to make them wait for years before admitting them to Postulancy.

She writes from Venice about an aspirant who is about to join:

*«On Monday, a novice sent by the Lord will join us. I would say it is quite miraculous... for seven years she has desired and prayed to join us»*.<sup>22</sup>

The Spouse, Jesus Christ, deserves to have other brides who are prepared as well as possible and who are faithful. Only then the joy of Magdalene is authentic and she wants to share it.

From Bergamo, in a festive tone she writes thus to Bragato, who at this time is the Mistress of Novices:

*«If all those with whom I am in contact come, I would come to Verona in a triumphant carriage. I know that on the one hand you will rejoice with me but on the other be fearful. But the more spouses the Lord has, the more reason we have to be happy»*.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> M.d.C., to Faccioli, 12 January 1826, Ep. III/2, p. 1296.

<sup>21</sup> M.d.C., to Terragnoli, 29 June 1827, Ep. III/2, p. 1152.

<sup>22</sup> M d.C., to Bragato, 30 June 1827, EpIII/4, p. 1687

<sup>23</sup> M d. C to Bragato. 5 November 1823, Ep. III/1, p. 712.

### 3. THE ITINERARY OF FORMATION FOR THE POSTULANT

Every period of formation needs above all gradual progression, continuity and clarity of aims towards which the young girls strive.

The phase of postulancy has the aim of preparing for the next phase that follows, the novitiate.

During this period the young girls go deeper into the call of God and the way of making their personal response to such a great gift, while the Institute evaluates their attitudes, the qualities of the young girls, their suitability to the mission and their potentials for continuing the formation.

Magdalene in the monograph on first formation reveals the wisdom of these principles which translate into practical criteria for the young postulants whom she calls *«the future hopes for the good of the Institute»*.<sup>1</sup>

#### **The first fifteen days**

The postulant is welcomed by the Superior of the House who entrusts her for the first fifteen days to the care of a sister,

*«...whom the Superior will judge as suitable... who, continues the Foundress, will be a sister who is very charitable and at the same time capable, prudent and much attached to the Institute»*.<sup>2</sup>

She will guide the postulant *«during the first two weeks»*<sup>3</sup> to help her overcome gradually the first impact with a very different style of life from that of the family.

In the tradition of the Institute the Sister who takes on this role is called the *«angel»*.

Resembling the guardian angel she is expected to have, according to the Foundress, all the characteristics.

For the entire period when she is guiding the postulant she will be exempted *«from keeping silence»*<sup>4</sup> not only during the day but also in the evening, except in the places set apart for community use. Such an exemption of the rule is a practical way of discovering the suitability of the young girl, her thoughts and her feelings.<sup>5</sup>

If *«after two or three evenings, it is clear that the novice is afraid»* the *«sister-angel»* will go and sleep

*«...in the Novice's room in a separate bed, of course, so that they can speak to each other, providing they whisper so as not to disturb the silence of the community»*.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 299.

<sup>2</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p- 30

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> cf. M.d.C., U.R., p. 301.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

These particular attentions given to each young girl who enters the Institute written into the rules by the Foundress, reveals a perception and pedagogical experience that is uncommon and a spiritual maternity that is truly exceptional.

### **the formation continues**

The first responsibility of the postulant after the fifteen days in the religious community is

*«...to make five days of Spiritual Exercises according to the method of St. Ignatius».*<sup>7</sup>

She will be helped by the Novice Mistress. Always careful to adapt the Spiritual Exercises to the first steps taken in the spiritual life of the young retreatant, Magdalene suggests not to follow too closely at least for thus once, the strict method of St. Ignatius, but

*«...that the Mistress should try to profit from this first encounter in order to tactfully gain the confidence of the probationers».*<sup>8</sup>

As a wise teacher of the spiritual life the Foundress indicates the content of the three days of Exercise:

*«...Let the Mistress keep her simply on the purgative way... she should instill in the probationer to prepare herself to receive from God the graces He will bestow on her in her new situation purifying her soul with sacramental Confession, either general or particular, as the Confessor of the House thinks best».*<sup>9</sup>

The concluding meditation will be on the theme of Divine Mercy. When the Spiritual Exercises end, the young girl will be admitted to all the community acts and will continue her experience of life under the guidance of the Mistress.

The formation will be based on the knowledge of Jesus Christ in order to make the encounter with Him more authentic and personal, not only in prayer but also in the various situations of life.

The foundress explains:

*“As the whole plan of the Institute is based on the imitation of Jesus Christ Crucified, she (the Mistress of Novices) will speak of the virtues indicated in the Rule itself and little by little, guide the probationer to an understanding that the life she must lead in the Institute has to have a certain conformity to that of Jesus Christ».*<sup>10</sup>

From the very beginning Magdalene wants the probationer to know the most important task that lies along her spiritual progress: personal encounter with Jesus Christ and to imitate His life until she is able to identify herself with the Crucified.

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<sup>7</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 312-313.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> M.d.C. U.R., P. 1^, p. 314-315

This goal which will constitute her progress for the rest of her religious life is presented to her with clarity from the time she enters the Institute.

Recognising Christ present in every man and progressing along the way of love to the Father is to know the deepest mystery of the Trinity.

To enter into a personal relationship with Christ through the work of the Spirit as demanded by religious consecration is, if lived in fulness, the most exciting adventure of human life.<sup>11</sup>

Magdalene had lived thus and she desired that every daughter of hers so lives.

The Foundress writes:

*«The probationer who ardently desires her spiritual good will take care to get accustomed at once to love and to search for her supreme good».*<sup>12</sup>

*«Only those who seek the Crucified should enter. They should be ready to lead a life, poor, humble*

*«in*

*«...need to be kept very much on the Eternal Truths in meditations... others may have to be kept on the Life, Passion and Death of Jesus Christ... but in all she will try to plant the Crucified Lord firmly in the heart of all of them».*<sup>13</sup>

The one and supreme good for every daughter is Jesus Christ Crucified.

She explains:

*, hidden and totally (consecrated) to imitating Him».*<sup>14</sup>

Every daily undertaking of the postulant must converge on this goal.

The first and the most important task is

*some way... to know the Lord», writes the Foundress and. «it is through prayer».*<sup>15</sup>

Regarding this daily practice the Novice Mistress will give guidelines

*«... for the various circumstances, different needs and situations of these girls».*<sup>16</sup>

*«let her reflect», she writes, «that one cannot hold to a set rule for all».*<sup>17</sup>

Some in fact will

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<sup>11</sup> The New code of Canon Law (1983) presents the life of a consecrated: «her whole existence becomes a continuous worship of God in charity». can. 607. 1.

<sup>12</sup> M.d.C., Regole del Noviziato, ms., p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, p. 316.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 25.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, p. 316.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p. 315.

*«...need to be kept very much on the Eternal Truths in meditations... others may have to be kept on the Life, Passion and Death of Jesus Christ... but in all she will try to plant the Crucified Lord firmly in the heart of all of them».*<sup>18</sup>

Another important way of knowing the Lord Jesus Christ better is the study of *Christian Doctrine*.

*«...for the whole of the trial period and for six months of the Novitiate, let the Mistress explain... according to our usual method... all that pertains to the Sacrament of Penance. Let the Mistress find out if the girl has any superstitions or practices so that she can enlighten and free her from them... Let her also explain to her the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist and teach her how to listen to the Mass».*<sup>19</sup>

With such daily instructions the postulant opens herself more and more to the mystery of the love of God who in Jesus Christ is present sacramentally to transform her in the image of the Spouse she has chosen as a companion in life.

At the same time, at least twice a week, the Mistress will explain to the Postulant

*«the spirit of the Rule and the system of the Institute a little at a time. But during probation and for about three months of the Novitiate, let her do so in the following way without mentioning the Rule».*<sup>20</sup>

Above all Magdalene wants the Postulants to assimilate slowly

*“the spirit of the Institute that is the spirit of the charity of Jesus Christ».*<sup>21</sup>

Only then can she

*«...touch with her hand, what the Lord wishes her to touch in this holy Vocation; she must accept to observe all that is laid down and necessary as it were to achieve this aim».*<sup>22</sup>

During the period when the postulant is not involved in the practices of piety and formation *«...she will be kept occupied in the various tasks of the House».* With this aim the Mistress of Novices will assign *«her to one of the Sisters in each job, on whom she must depend for everything»*<sup>23</sup>

With the aim of testing the attitudes of the young girl, also in the apostolic activities specific to the Institute, the Superior and the Mistress of Novices will come to an agreement to send

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<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p. 316.

<sup>19</sup> M.d.C, U.R., p. 318.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p. 314

<sup>21</sup> cf. *ibid.*, p. 245.

<sup>22</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 314-315

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, p. 313.

«...her every two weeks to the Hospital or... to assist in the school fo Doctrine»<sup>24</sup>  
«whichever they judge, is best for her».<sup>25</sup>

This particular point which the Foundress emphasizes in the monograph on the novitiate, gives to the general rules the characteristic of formation which is clearly personalized.

### **Magdalene follows up and evaluates**

Magdalene, as a mother who is watchful and concerned, follows the first uncertain steps of the young postulants. From some she requests information and about others she communicates through letters her impressions.

She thus writes to Bernardi, the Superior of Milan:

*«I will willingly hear how the novice who entered recently is adapting herself to her new career and if she seems to be harvv».*<sup>26</sup>

A young girl had entered the Postulancy in Verona a few days before and Magdalene writes:

*«...the first two days, she was very depressed Yesterday and today she seems to be happy and content Please pray to Most Holy Mary for her».*<sup>27</sup>

About another, without being the least upset, as though the phenomenon were quite natural, she says:

*«You will have heard.. our dear Beatrice has entered»<sup>28</sup> but let me tell you she is so bewildered that she does not know if she is coming or going».*<sup>29</sup>

Of Anna Rizzi, the daughter who will assist her in 1835 during her last moments, she writes a few days after her entry into the Institute:

*«Annetta... finds herself in a new world... she is keeping well, eats sufficiently well but she is very confused, as is quite natural».*<sup>30</sup>

And some time later:

*«Annetta... greets you, she is keeping well and is as happy as the sound of a little bell».*<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, p. 254.

<sup>25</sup> M.d.C.. R.d.N.. ms., p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> M.d.C. to Bernardi, mares 1818, Ep. III/5, p. 3990.

<sup>27</sup> M.d.C. to Bernardi, 22 November 1817, Ep. III/I, p. 139.

<sup>28</sup> Olivieri Beatrice, of Riva di Trento, entered at Verona in 1820 at the age of 24 and died in 1827. The chronicles of the sisters and her contemporaries attest: «...her death was holy and preceded by a life spent in the constant practice of shining virtues...» (P. VR, Q. 1, P. 3, A.C.R.)

<sup>29</sup> M.d.C. to Bernardi, 13 May 1820, Ep. III/I, p. 362.

<sup>30</sup> M.d.C., to Terragnoli, 26 July 1829, EpIII/4, p. 2166.

<sup>31</sup> M.d.C.. to Terragnoli, 6 December 1829, EpIII/4, p. 2235.

Magdalene writes to the Superior of Bergamo about a girl whom she follows maternally and even with pain until she returns to her family:

*«Zappettini is very well, she greets all of you... She is confused at the novelty of everything. She is always attached to that angel Teresina, but she conducts herself very well».*<sup>32</sup>

After some days:

*«Zappettini is emerging little by little from her state of confusion caused by the novelty».*<sup>33</sup>

But the following July, from Verona, where the postulant had just been transferred to begin her novitiate, Magdalene writes:

*«...this daughter... continues with her doubts, fears and perplexities... as soon as she arrived here she ceased to be joyful as she was in our house in Bergamo».*<sup>34</sup>

And in October:

*«Today Zappettini should return to her home. Just when everything was going well... she began to have regrets... I asked her to stay on to try a little longer. I have taken time to have a novena made which we will start this evening and we shall see what the Lord wants».*<sup>35</sup>

At the end of the month, with suffering, Magdalene writes:

*«...Saturday evening... to my great regret, Zappettini returned to her home».*<sup>36</sup>

The pain, natural at the loss of a future hope of the Institute derives also from the fear that the decision to return definitely to the family will not bring about the realization of the plan of God for the young girl:

*“For me, she writes, I desire only that the will of God be accomplished and that no mistake is made.”*<sup>37</sup>

But if one girl leaves, two enter. She comments on this in a letter addressed to Faccioli:

*«They both entered joyously».*<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> M.d.C., to Dabala, 29 April 1827, R.s.s., P. 2', p. 365.

<sup>33</sup> M.d.C., to Dabala, 2 May 1827, R.s.s., P. 2^, p. 367

<sup>34</sup> M.d.C., to Don Zanetti, 19 July 1827, Ep. II/1, p. 439.

<sup>35</sup> M.d.C., to Bragato, 21 October 1827, EpIII/4, p. 1746.

<sup>36</sup> M d C, to Brazato. 31 October 1827. EpIII/4, p. 1757.

<sup>37</sup> M.d.C., to Don Zanetti, 19 July 1827, Ep. II/1, p. 440.

<sup>38</sup> M.d.C., to Faccioli, 29 January 1834, Ep. III/S p. 3563

The contentment and availability in the service of God are the characteristics most desired and emphasized by the Foundress. Thus she writes to her friend Durini regarding two young girls, shortly after they entered:

*«Rachetina... is a real angel, happy like the others beyond measure».*<sup>39</sup>

To the Superior of Venice she reports on a young girl, a native of Burano<sup>40</sup> whom she had brought along with her to Verona as a Postulant:

*«Buranella did not suffer during the journey and she told me that it seemed as though she were in Heaven. She seems to me to be a steady person».*<sup>41</sup>

Two days later:

*«She is very good and is very contented».*<sup>42</sup>

If happiness is one of the most important signs of a vocation for Magdalene, no less is «a good nature», a good judgment», and good character.

She writes about a young girl who has recently entered:

*«...We have the satisfaction that this last novice... who has just been accepted, conducts herself very well. She is clever and has an angelic character».*<sup>43</sup>

About two other Veronese girls she says: *al have yet to know the colour» of their will»*,<sup>44</sup>

And this for Magdalene is one of the basic dispositions to conform to the will of God in religious life in whatever place and in whatever situation.

She thus writes to a young girl who has not yet been received:

*...in this world the only real good we can do is the will of God».*<sup>45</sup>

And once they have entered the young girls

*« have to be guided in a special way. If they are neglected, the devil becomes active».*<sup>46</sup>

She is always the expert educator:

*«...experience teaches how necessary it is to deal at length with postulants to discover their spiritual state and to ascertain the outcome».*<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> M.d.C., to Durini, 7 January 1819, Ep. I, p. 502.

<sup>40</sup> Burano, Isola di Venezia.

<sup>41</sup> M.d.C., to Terragnoli, 8 July 1827, EpIII/4, p. 1694.

<sup>42</sup> M.d.C., to Terragnoli, 15 July 1827, EpIII/4, p. 1696. Later on the young girl had to leave because of health reasons

<sup>43</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, 29 May 1819, Ep. III/1, p. 302.

<sup>44</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, 5 March 1817, Ep. III/1, p. 50.

<sup>45</sup> M.d.C., to Chiara, 24 December 1833, Ep. III/5, p. 3530.

<sup>46</sup> M.d.C., to Terragnoli, 3 April 1833, Ep. III/5, p. 3330.

<sup>47</sup> M d C.. to Rosmini. 3 October 1821, Ep. III/1, p. 446.

## 4. THE AGENTS OF FORMATION

### The Holy Spirit

In Christian formation, and especially in that of consecrated life, the first and indispensable director is the Holy Spirit<sup>1</sup>. No one guideline in religious formation, not even the most complete, humanly speaking, can be considered as solely responsible for the initial phase and the progressive maturation of one's vocation.

That is exclusively the work of the Holy Spirit who calls the person from within to communicate Himself and help her grow to the perfect stature of the God-Man.

The vocation in its initial phase is like the seed that has fallen on the soil and which demands patience both on the part of the one who has sown and on the part of the recipient and which requires constant cultivation until maturity is attained.

The action of the Spirit is in fact decisive, dynamic, constant and transforming. If there are no obstacles, the masterpiece, desired by God and every man, and especially for every consecrated person, can be brought to completion. He alone knows where the Father calls each one and He alone knows the means for reaching where God calls.

The Holy Spirit not only reinforces and orientates the chosen person, but uses all the natural and supernatural components, even the negative at his disposal. The positive components are above all else the Word of God destined to have an important effect if well received in the life of each of the faithful.

In the second place prayer, sacraments and every other human mediation, are providential for every Christian and religious vocational «journey».

Magdalene attributes the gift of new vocations to the action of the Holy Spirit.

Thus she writes in a letter sent to a gentleman of Brescia who helped in establishing a house in that city:

*«At present... the thing is not possible, so that it is better to leave it to the Holy Spirit to bring us His new brides».*<sup>2</sup>

### the postulant

After the Holy Spirit the principle and responsible agent for formation is the young girl called to a life of consecration. Hence, the necessity of a personal discernment, of a profound and persevering attitude of listening, of availability and active collaboration with regard to the Holy Spirit who is always active and working.<sup>3</sup>

Mary is the most noteworthy example and model of an interior availability which allows the Spirit to work and crown the plan of the Father in every calling. The young girl, rich in personal charism compares hers to that of the Institute and gradually discovers whether or not she possesses the necessary dispositions required to follow along the path undertaken.

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<sup>1</sup> cf. LG, 43.

<sup>2</sup> M.d.C., a C. Manziana, 17 January 1834, Ep. II/2, p. 999.

<sup>3</sup> cf. LG, 44.

The most important task of the young girl in every phase of her formation is that «of taking in hand the direction of her own life»<sup>4</sup> to know and accept herself, to grow in human maturity accepting guidance and counsel to make herself responsible for the choice she made and to become always more motivated according to the hierarchy of human values and charism of the Institute she has chosen.

All this comes about through an openness to human mediations around her in the name of the Church and the Institute<sup>5</sup>.

The Foundress expresses herself thus:

*«On entering, the probationer... will try to understand the state of life she is about to embrace... by trying to persuade herself that this Institute demands a universal detachment from everything that is not God».*<sup>6</sup>

This is a programme which is not only relevant for just a brief period of probation, but for one's whole life.

## **The Church**

The Institute is a gift of God to the Church. Every member is linked by a special title not only to Christ but also to the one who visibly represents Him<sup>7</sup>.

The Church in the formation of young girls called to the life of consecration, has a precise and determining role. Her assistance in formation is experienced by the young girls throughout their entire lives, not only as Christians but above all as consecrated religious. The vocation is given from God, but has been recognised from the very beginning by the Church who follows the young girls with watchful concern, by means of the Institute, as they slowly proceed through their formation period and arrive at the final consecration which is approved by and presided over by the Church<sup>8</sup>.

The Word of God reaches her profusely and surely from the Magisterium of the Church. The sacramental life which daily sustains and enriches her is the gift of the Church. Her personal relationship with Christ is continued through the mediation of the Church and the Institute which is inserted into it and has its roots deep in the Church<sup>9</sup>.

Magdalene lives and breathes in the Church, not only as a baptised person but especially as Foundress. Her Institute which was born and which grows in the Church is for the service of the Church.

From the beginnings of the institution she informs the Holy Father, the Supreme representative of the Church, about everything:

*«...as I believe it is very necessary that he should know about everything... everything must be open and clear to him... At his slightest sign... all of my poor person, all of the Institute, and all that belongs to me and is dependent on me are at his disposal».*<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> RC. 31. II. 3.

<sup>5</sup> cf. LG, 43.

<sup>6</sup> M.d.C., R.d.N., ms. p.

<sup>7</sup> cf. LG, 43

<sup>8</sup> C.D.C.. can. 654

<sup>9</sup> cf. LG, 44.

<sup>10</sup> M.d.C. to Durini 26 March 1819, Ep. 1, p. 507.

Such interior dispositions arise from a deep conviction of faith. She thus affirms in a letter directed to Cardinal Fontana:

*«...my soul longs to accomplish God's will which I recognise in that of the most Holy Vicar of Jesus Christ, our chief Pastor».*<sup>11</sup>

Magdalene is convinced that the «Institute is a gift of God made to the Church to help build the Kingdom of Christ»<sup>12</sup> in the world.

Presenting the aim of her foundation to the ecclesiastical and civil authorities she writes:

*«...this Institute, small as it is, has no other aim than that of all the other most Holy Institutes which adorn and really serve the Holy Church».*<sup>13</sup>

And she declares that not only she as Foundress but also all her daughters are

*«...called by Divine Providence to serve the Church... to dedicate themselves to the good of their neighbours».*<sup>14</sup>

In the treatise pertaining to the same formation Magdalene could not omit her recommendation to love and offer a spirit of service to the Church:

*«...these daughters... should be formed above all in the spirit of the Holy Church, both for themselves as well as for sharing it with others when the moment comes for them to be active in the works of charity».*<sup>15</sup>

Inserted in the local Churches, the Daughters of Charity should in fact, according to the mind of the Foundress, as far as Catechesis and every other parish activity is concerned

*«...depend with filial respect totally on their local Ordinaries».*<sup>16</sup>

## **The Institute**

Formation is the work of the entire Institute. All the members of the Religious Family are concerned, directly or indirectly, from the highest governing authority to the youngest sister in the community involved in education.

To conserve and to hand down integrally the spirit of the Institute is, according to the Foundress, the concern of all the daughters:

*«Let each one take care... on her part», she writes in the conclusion of the Rules, «to hand down integrally and perfectly the spirit of the Institute to those who will come after you».*<sup>17</sup>

If it is true that all the members of the Institute must be involved in the work of first formation, it is more so for the Superiors at all levels.

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<sup>11</sup> M.d.C. to Card. F6ntana, I February 1820, Ep. II/I, p. 551.

<sup>12</sup> R o L. art. 2, p. 13

<sup>13</sup> M.d.C., Ep. II/2, p. 1409.

<sup>14</sup> M.d.C., Ep. II/I, p. 115.

<sup>15</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. 1', p. 134.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 75.

<sup>17</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. 18, p. 165.

And with the aim of avoiding a generic formation which brings with it «the risk of a levelling off to some extent in religious life»<sup>18</sup> the person primarily responsible in the Institute, with her collaborators, should instruct and ascertain that the formation received has the specific imprint of the Institute.

What should be especially safeguarded and promoted to this end is the Foundress's original perception, the project of formation which she herself had elaborated with the aim of remaining faithful in time to the «nature, purpose, spirit, character and also the sound traditions of the Institute».<sup>19</sup>

The preparation of educators is the task of primary and fundamental importance because it is from them more than from any other sister (daughter) that the typical and charismatic character of the Institute depends.

All this “promotes the unity of the Institute from within»<sup>20</sup> and guarantees the unique, permanent and vivifying action of the Holy Spirit in the Church of Christ.

The Foundress in her various writings on first formation directs her most urgent recommendations to the person who is primarily responsible:

*«the Superior should have at heart above all... the concern for handing down the spirit of service of God and the Institute».*<sup>21</sup>

Towards this aim, she should, first of all, take care

*«about the reception of novices, on whom rest the future hopes of the Institute».*<sup>22</sup>

To avoid that the Superior be the sole judge of the young ones joining the Institute she states:

*«sh should ask the advice of her assistants, informing them of everything she knows (about the young girls) and then judge with the Lord's help».*<sup>23</sup>

After the reception, it is again the Superior who will entrust the young girl to a Sister who will assist her during the first two weeks. Again, it is the Superior who will then place the Postulant in the hands of the Mistress of Novices.<sup>24</sup>

During this period of formation, the Superior will be the mother and advisor of the Mistress of Novices in the difficulties which may arise in this delicate mission.

She will not only counsel but will also visit the young sisters in formation, animating and exhorting them

*«...to make good use of a period... so precious for beginning the work of their sanctification».*<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> «I cappuccini si rinnovano», tip. Lux de Cruce, MI, 1982.

<sup>19</sup> C.D.C. can 578

<sup>20</sup> E. Gambari. Il noviziato nel nuovo codice, Ed. Rogate, Roma, 1985, p. 53.

<sup>21</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. 1<sup>^</sup>, p. 125, n. 19.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> cf., M.d.C., R.d.N., ms., p. 24 Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> M.d.C.. R.s.s., P. I, p. 302.

Her counsel and encouragement will be very valid in cases where some young girl

*«...wavering in her vocation has any inclination towards another state of life».*<sup>26</sup>

Before she decides to send the young girl back to her family the Superior will ask for much prayer from the entire community «scrupulously concealing the reason».

In the meantime she will treat the young girl

*«...with extreme gentleness and charity but keep her occupied in things suited to raising her spirits... Then with great prudence, no matter what sorrow it may cause to part from her, let the Superior find the way of returning the Sister to her family and dismiss her promptly»*<sup>27</sup>

There are many things that should be noted in these recommendations of the Foundress to the person who is directly in charge of formation: the respect for the young girl as a person with freedom to decide about her own life, the prayers of the Community so that God's will may be shown clearly to the young girl, prudent and respectful secrecy for the young girl in a moment of special difficulty. All this reveals in the Foundress a methodology of conduct prompted by exquisite evangelical charity.

### **The Novice Mistress**

The Novice Mistress is a person entrusted with a mission of forming the young girl in the initial period and later on.

Her task is not only irreplaceable but also one of great responsibility in the Institute.

Thus Magdalene begins the chapter, pertaining to this office:

*«In every Institute this role (of Novice Mistress) has always, with good reason, been considered as one of the most important for the good of religious houses».*<sup>28</sup>

And continues:

*“...one more than she can collaborate and maintain constant and unchanged the spirit of the Institute itself».*<sup>29</sup>

To carry out this delicate «ministry»<sup>30</sup>

*«...the sister chosen for this role really needs to be close to God”.*<sup>31</sup>

to guide the souls entrusted to her not on their own paths but along that of God.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 303.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 303.

<sup>28</sup> M.d.c.. U.R.. 310

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 311.

<sup>30</sup> M.d.C., U.R., P. 1 a, p. 142.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid 310

She should be gifted with human qualities to help her discern, accompany and nourish the spiritual life of the young girls and also to examine and evaluate the vocation of each one in the light of the Institute's own charism.

Regarding that methodology to adopt with the young postulants, the Foundress proves herself an incomparable teacher:

*«...study her well», she writes, «from the first days of her postulancy... from a distance... not correcting any defect... try to discover the character, temperament and inclinations; to understand and judge whether it be more efficacious and opportune for her spiritual good to guide her with gentleness together with firmness or if there might be greater profit in treating her with absolute gentleness».*<sup>32</sup>

Gentleness is one of the charismatic requisites exacted by Magdalene from her daughters. The words “sweetness and meekness» occur often, not only in her letters but also in the «Unabridged Rules » .<sup>33</sup>

To these two virtues the Novice Mistress must add extreme patience and know how to await even if progress in formation made by the young postulant is slow.

*“...In correcting her», she writes, «the Novice Mistress is especially advised to keep to the principle of taking the motive for correction from the probationer's own words...»*<sup>34</sup>

Reading these suggestions one has the impression of finding a method of correction recommended, in interpersonal relationships, in the best of contemporary psychological studies.

Further the Foundress, does not limit herself only to exhortations but gives the motives for this suggestion of hers:

*«...because one cannot expect from a person who has such a wealth of virtues to love her defects being corrected by other sisters. Normally this grade of virtue comes after the Novitiate».*<sup>35</sup>

One of the charismatic virtues proper to the Daughters of Charity is humility, not intended as a moral virtue but as a theological virtue.

For Magdalene, humility is:

*“...the soul that acknowledges its own nothingness... knows how to find everything in God »*<sup>36</sup>

and this acknowledging of oneself as nothing before God is the necessary condition

*“...for Divine Love to invade a heart»*<sup>37</sup> detached from itself.

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<sup>32</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 313.

<sup>33</sup> cf. p. 5

<sup>34</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 314

<sup>35</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 314.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid" p. 240.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 235.

From the beginning the Novice Mistress

*«...measuring things with charity, prudence and discretion should try to instill holy humility in the young girl and see to it that she be well formed in this virtue... ».*<sup>38</sup>

In this first period of formation, more than making her practise acts of humility, it will be good to make her love and desire this indispensable *virtue*».<sup>39</sup>

The correction of the sister is better made

*“...in a friendly and almost joking manner as this is more persuasive».*<sup>40</sup>

The Novice Mistress should not only exhort orally, but

*“...profit from the occasions, that will not be lacking, to make her understand her own nothingness and inability».*<sup>41</sup>

But at the same time, in these cases,

*«...she should be careful to comfort her with confidence in God and the strength of the grace of vocation».*<sup>42</sup>

Other attentions of maternal delicacy are suggested by the Foundress to the Novice Mistress:

*«When she sees the young woman, as will often happen, troubled, sad or tempted, that is the time to really use her maternal charity».*<sup>43</sup>

Above all, search for the cause that disturbs her: if she is troubled, search for the reason and encourage her in the exercise of virtue; if she is melancholy try to keep her occupied without letting her know that you are doing it on purpose. If she is tempted, «let the Novice Mistress listen with charity, never showing wonder at anything she may say<sup>44</sup>- Do not disdain her, «but encourage, console and comfort her and *remember*

*«...that it is better not to crush the bent reed ».*<sup>45</sup>

If a more in-depth spiritual discernment reveals that the young girl

*“...is beset with temptations»*<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> M.d.C. U.R., p. 320.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 321.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 321.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

because of her vivid imagination, the Novice Mistress, always guided by the spirit of charity and discretion, should try to shake her out of them even by laughing at her fantasies.

*«...this is sometimes the real way to help her».*<sup>47</sup>

These first pages referring to Postulancy reveal in Magdalene a refined knowledge of the human psyche and especially the female one, seasoned always with evangelical charity. Here is how the treatise on the first phase of religious life concludes:

*«The Novice Mistress»... should try to set her on the way to perfection without frightening her... Let her remember the Patriarch Jacob and how he set the pace of his entire caravan to that of the tender lambs. The Novice Mistress must see that little by little the young girl gets accustomed to the responsibilities of the Institute... as this is an Institute that requires a strong soul stripped of women's weaknesses»*<sup>48</sup>

Without making it evident, the Mistress of Novices must have

*«...great care for the health of the probationer... and when she sees that some relaxation is opportune... in charity let her take it... ».*<sup>49</sup>

All these attentions which should characterize the conduct of the Mistress of Novices, reveals the Foundress' preoccupations to proceed with the formation gradually and to expect of each postulant a spiritual progress at her own pace.

The Foundress exhorts again: The Novice Mistress

*«...should watch that the Probationer does not do more than she can. she should try to see, especially at the beginning, that she becomes accustomed a little at a time to the food and everything else».*<sup>50</sup>

The Novice Mistress will treat the novices with great charity so as to help each one arrive at the charismatic identity proper to the Daughters of Charity.

But in the meantime, as an expert with typically maternal attitudes, the Foundress in concluding the first part pertaining to formation advises:

The Novice Mistress

*“...should imitate good mothers, who behave very differently with their young daughters than they do with adults».*<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> M.d.C., U.R., P. 1a, pp. 321-322

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> M.d.C., U.R., P. 1a, p. 136.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

The community constitutes part of the religious life and as such has an important role for the girls in formation.

The experience of the Christ-Word, Christ-Sacrament, Christ-mystical body, Christ-the Missionary of the Father come together as different expressions of community life, a fundamental component of religious life.<sup>52</sup>

Community life has been and is still today one of the most stimulating and decisive factors of formation.

The young postulants undergoing training and living a communal life, are models of consecrated religious life.

These persons «brought together as a true family in the name of the Lord, sharing the same charism, animated by charity, made strong by the presence of the Lord and bound together by bonds sanctioned by the Church»<sup>53</sup> provide the environment and style of life most favourable to the spiritual journey of the young girls.

Together, those undergoing formation and the educators constitute with the Novice Mistress a community which lives in communion. Each one helps the other in the realization of one's specific identity, a process that constitutes but which is never fully realised.

In the treatise dealing with the office of the Novice Mistress, the Foundress nominates a series of persons in the community who collaborate with her in the work of formation.

They are: the sister who will guide the postulants during the first two weeks of their entrance, the sisters with some internal responsibilities to whom the young girls are temporarily entrusted, the sisters who are responsible for the various works of charity, and with whom periodically the postulants work.

The Superior remains the principal person responsible for the work of formation and the Novice Mistress will show her

*«...real submission, deference and dependence».*<sup>54</sup>

Within the limits of her office the Novice Mistress will exercise prudent autonomy, but

*“...in order to proceed with certainty she should consult with the Superior».*<sup>55</sup>

And the reasons which Magdalene gives are admirably evangelical:

*«...The Superior», she continues, his the ordinary means through which the Lord will enlighten her, besides where two or three are gathered in the name of the Lord, He is in the midst of them»*<sup>56</sup>

The exchange of opinions between the Superior and the Novice Mistress and Sisters on the conduct of the young girls will be frequent.

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<sup>52</sup> cf. C.D.C., can 607, 2:665, 1.

<sup>53</sup> E. Gambari, *Vita religiosa*, ed Monfortane, Roma, 1985, p. 345

<sup>54</sup> M.d.C., U.R., P. 1<sup>^</sup>, p. 311.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 324.

<sup>56</sup> M.d.C., U.R., P. 1 s, p. 324

Here are some recommendations handed down by the Foundress to the Superior:

*“After two weeks, the Mistress will be informed by the Superior about everything of importance<sup>57</sup> that the Sister in charge for that time may have noticed regarding each of these Novices».*<sup>58</sup>

And in turn she recommends the Novice Mistress:

*«...besides frequently visiting the place where the probationer is working, at the same time she is to keep herself well informed by the Superior or by the sisters in charge of the respective tasks ...as to how she behaves».*<sup>59</sup>

Such an exchange of information will serve to consolidate and unify in the person of the Novice Mistress the method of intervening with the young girls in a way that is to the greatest spiritual advantage.

Periodical meetings at the level of those who are responsible for formation will be held, aiming at a more concerted effort and to correct objectives and methods to be adopted or eventually modified.

The Novice Mistress on such occasions will give a clear and frank report about the conduct of the young girls entrusted to her.

In the meetings which the Superior will hold, the Foundress says:

*«..the Superior and her other assistant (Novice Mistress) must give a report about her novices at their meetings... woe to the Novice Mistress if she hides any of the Novices' behaviour... she would remain responsible in front of the Lord for all the worst consequences that would be the outcome of this . »*<sup>60</sup>

Such meetings, where concrete situations are presented, will help to review or to discern the methods to be adopted in the formation programme, or to pin-point the cause for failure to reach or only partially achieve the objectives. And the causes could be verified as to whether it is in the methods adopted by the educators or in the incapacity or slowness of those under formation. In either case, vital dialogue during these periodic meetings will contribute to the spiritual benefit of those who are responsible and that of the young girls for a discernment of the will of God and a greater fidelity to the spirit of the Institute.

Not only the educational community thus conceived is a valid factor in the work of formation but the entire community of the Institute should be involved in a task so important for the continuity and future vitality of the Institute.

Thus comments a noted author, an expert on religious life:

*“Religious Life, as it is lived in the Houses of the Institute, is an undoubted influence in impressing, stimulating, attracting and strengthening vocations».*<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 312.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 312.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> M.d.C., U.R., P. I ^, p. 335.

<sup>61</sup> E. Gambari, 11 Noviziato nel nuovo Codice, p. 63.

## 5. EVALUATION OF FORMATION EXPERIENCE

### on the part of the young girls

The first evaluation is above all made by the young girl herself undergoing formation. For the entire period of probation, the postulant will evaluate herself as to the validity of the choice made, that is, if she is decided on continuing the way undertaken, if she intends to let herself be loved by Christ who has called her to follow Him, if she intends to love Him as the Supreme value of her life, if she feels capable of realizing the gift of herself in the community life and if she thinks that her own personal charism corresponds generally to the spirit and mission of the Institute she has chosen.

All this has to be examined and evaluated in daily life little by little as she deepens the knowledge of herself and new aspects are discovered in the life which she has freely. Regarding a possible return to the family by the young girl the Foundress has thus defined:

*«those who are unhappy are allowed to leave».*<sup>1</sup>

She is so convinced that happiness is one of the sure signs of a vocation and considers it a grace from the Lord when she is rid of unhappy girls.

*«...may the Lord grant us the grace that anyone who is unhappy should leave».*<sup>2</sup>

### on the part of the Institute

The Institute on its part is also called to evaluate the authenticity of the vocation of the postulant.

The criteria for a sound discernment of suitability for the Institute are listed by the Foundress: «Let anyone be sent home who, repentant of their vocation desires to live in another state of life, or

*«...reveals a restless and irascible temperament and lacks charity because of it or who frequently places herself in the danger of losing her temper.*

*— ...finds that she is not suitable for the works of charity and objectives of the Institute.*

*— ...lacks good health<sup>3</sup> or who is afflicted with an incurable disease”.*<sup>4</sup>

Before making a decision about sending back a young girl for reasons of health, the Foundress would gather more accurate information. A certain Margherita, after joining the Institute for a few months revealed that she was afflicted with epilepsy. After writing a dozen or so letters in which she asked for detailed descriptions about the symptoms of the disease, and following advice received from well known specialists the Foundress thus writes to the Superior of Milan:

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<sup>1</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 71.

<sup>2</sup> M.d.C., to Bragato, 5 April 1826, Ep. III/2, p. 1347.

<sup>3</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. 13, pp. 50-51.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 49

«*Margherita is absolutely not for us*»<sup>5</sup> even though «*I am sorry to lose an angel*».<sup>6</sup>

Magdalene is less uncertain about sending back to their families those suffering from mental disorder. She writes to Bragato, the Novice Mistress at that time:

«*...for Moderato we need a clear miracle because the ailment is not in the heart but in the mind*»<sup>7</sup>

And in another letter she explains:

«*... the ailment is not in the will but in the mind*».<sup>8</sup>

«*...and in such cases it is only through a miracle that a remedy can be obtained*».<sup>9</sup>

Magdalene takes upon herself all the responsibility in order to spare the Novice Mistress anxiety:

«*...the reason why Rose... will return to the family is because of my decision... she (the Novice Mistress) has nothing to do with this as she knows very well that this daughter, even though she is very good, does not have a vocation for our Institute... I thank the Lord with all my heart that He has freed us from an individual who would not have been suitable for us in any way*».<sup>10</sup>

And about another postulant who is sent back to the family, she writes:

«*Even... if it is painful to you... rather than having a dissatisfied person or one who is not suitable for the vocation, it is far better to send her home*».<sup>11</sup>

In 1830, after much experience, she writes:

«*The girls who have no vocation, like those who are dull, cause a lot of difficulties in the community*».<sup>12</sup>

Such criteria are thus justified:

“*May the Institute be conserved in its spirit and its integrity*».<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, 19 June 1820, Ep. II/VI, p. 370.

<sup>6</sup> M.d.C., to Durini, 3 June 1820, Ep. I, p. 510.

<sup>7</sup> M.d.C., to Bragato, 6 October 1819, Ep. III/I, p. 328.

<sup>8</sup> M.d.C., to Bragato, 25 September 1819, EP. III/I, p. 325.

<sup>9</sup> M.d.C., to Bragato, 14 December 1819, EP. III/I, p. 339.

<sup>10</sup> M.d.C., to Bragato, 25 February 1821, EP. III/I, p. 404.

<sup>11</sup> M.d.C., to Bragato, 26 October 1824, Ep. III/2, p. 979.

<sup>12</sup> M.d.C., to Renzi, 21 April 1830, Ep. II/2, p. 1179.

<sup>13</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. I', p. 126

PART THREE

MAGDALENE OF CANOSSA  
AND  
THE NOVICES

## 1. THE NOVITIATE ACCORDING TO MAGDALENE'S IDEAS

### **Christ, the Centre of our life**

For Magdalene, the time of the novitiate is a period wherein the young girl who has been called, intensifies in prayer and solitude the rapport with the person of Jesus Christ. She is becoming aware of answering with the dedication of her being to the loving God who has given her the proof of His personal love when He invited her to follow Him. The growth in the knowledge of Christ, God made man, will help the young girl attain an ever more profound communion with Him and an increasing desire to improve her life in order to conform ever more to the way of thinking, willing, feeling and living Christ himself.

Magdalene writes to the Novice Mistress:

*«...make her meditate on and consider... the life, teaching, spirit and suffering of Jesus Christ our Lord on whose life the novice must would and undertake that which she is about to begin in the Novitiate».*<sup>1</sup>

The period of the Novitiate is intended for this very purpose. In the introduction to the Rules our Foundress writes:

*«...the scope of this Institute... is to animate all our actions and work with the Spirit of Jesus Christ».*<sup>2</sup>

In order to achieve such a goal, the young girl should, from her Novitiate days:

*«...be accustomed to living a real spirit of faith which not only detaches the soul from everything which is not God, but... will make her pleased to accept with any disposition of the Lord regarding herself».*<sup>3</sup>

The interior disposition of availability which should accompany her all her life becomes the driving force of her own activity.

The stronger her love for Christ, the more prompt her response to the demands of divine love. Only this bond of love will be the power urging the young girl to share ever more concretely in the dispositions of the Spouse who so generously gives Himself to her so that she may be ever more imbued with His own love.

Magdalene has these words for a young Novice:

*«...remember that the lord is a jealous Lord, and He wants to find your heart stripped of every worldly attachment I would like, on my return, to find you belonging totally to Him».*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 325.

<sup>2</sup> M.d.C., U.R., pp. 18-19.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 227-228

<sup>4</sup> M.d.C., to G. Prada, 13 July 1826, Ep. III/2, p. 1447.

After such a premise of the unconditional gift of self to God. Magaladen continues:

*«...do your best my dear daughter through the help of God, to curb all your inclinations».*<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, when the heart is aflame with the love of God, the ascent is also joyful. Magdalene writes to another Novice:

*«...do persevere in the practice of virtue to attain the union your are longing for».*<sup>6</sup>

The spousal rapport with Christ should be aimed at through the practice of virtues based on faith, hope and charity.<sup>7</sup>

Magdalene writes:

*«...The Novitiate is a time,... whrein we should strive to obtain all virtues, whose practice becomes doubly necessary for those persons who have to work much».*<sup>8</sup>

Training in the practice of human virtues, transformed into Christian and religious virtues, demands from the young novice a progressive renunciation of self in order to abandon her own way and to follow that trodden by Christ, «Supremely loved».<sup>9</sup>

For this reason the Novitiate is like a training field where the young girl tries to abandon self to tread the path of liberation, the only way to true love, both human and divine.

Magdalene wishes that her Daughters:

*«...be full of the spirit of the Lord».*<sup>10</sup>

This is why the young girls, from the Novitiate should try:

*«...to uproot that beginnings of those passions, inclinations and defects, which, with the passing of time could bring about a deviation from the spirit of the Institute».*<sup>11</sup>

### **in the spirit of the Institute**

The spirit of the Institute is a goal that the novices should look and aim at with determination and generosity.

*«...to understand its spirit and be imbued with it»*<sup>12</sup>

which to Magdalene means to become possessed by divine charity and thus live,

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> M.d.C., to Rosa Polli, 1 November 1826, Ep. III/2, p. 1527.

<sup>7</sup> cf. Is. 61.

<sup>8</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 310 10.

<sup>9</sup> LG, n. 34

<sup>10</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 155.

<sup>11</sup> M.d.C. U.R., p- 323

<sup>12</sup> M.d.c-. U.R., P- 17

*“in the spirit of Jesus Crucified».*<sup>13</sup>

The ascetic life of the Institute tends to an identification of its members with Christ so that He may grant us His own charity which is a two-fold love for the Father and for our brethren.

This is why the novice should be taught *«mentat prayer of the heart»*<sup>14</sup> wherein the rapport of love between the soul and God is more genuine and ardent.

Paul states: *«Whoever is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with Him».*<sup>15</sup>

The more the spirit of Jesus Christ takes possession of the soul of the novice, the nearer she will be to the identity of a Daughter of Charity.

Magdalene is very much consoled when she perceives that the novices are moved by the true spirit.

Magdalene writes to Countess Durini referring to novice known to the latter:

*«Rachelina possesses a remarkable spirit of prayer»*<sup>16</sup>

Magdalene writes from Trent to the same Countess:

*«...what is more consoling is to hear that the novices are good natured, happy and full of fervour».*<sup>17</sup>

To Angela Bragato Magdalene writes of another novice:

*«Nunziatina's behaviour is such that we cannot expect more...  
She is ever more in love with God...»*<sup>18</sup>

To fall in love with God is the fundamental aim of the first formation. The Novitiate should, therefore, favour in every way elements indispensable for creating the right climate so that the young girl may tend to a gradual unification of her life even when in the future she will be involved in apostolic activity.

#### **in a convenient time**

This formative experience, even in the initial stage not only demands that the young girl be available to the action of divine grace, but also requires a patient and constant striving for a sufficient long period of time for the essential values of the religious life to be gradually interiorized and for the Spirit of Christ living and active in the heart of the young girl to orient and transform her life.

To this end from the very initial stage of the founding of the Institute, Magdalene notes on the duration of the novitiate:

*«I would fix the period of the Novitiate to last two years and more, if necessary, but no  
chnstPr see it is more necessary for the Congregation to have sisters with a sure and  
solid vocation, than large numbers».*<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 19

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>15</sup> 1 Cor 6, 17

<sup>16</sup> M.d.C., to Durini, 16 January 1819, Ep. I, p. 504.

<sup>17</sup> M.d.C., to Durini, 18 July 1828, Ep. I, p. 539.

<sup>18</sup> M.d.C., to Bragato, 5 March 1823, Ep. III/I, pp. 618-619.

<sup>19</sup> M.d.C., U.R., P.2a, p. 78.

In the final Rule the Foundress states that the young girl will remain in the Novitiate:

*«...not less than one year...» and after receiving the religious-habtt «she shall continue the Novitiate which should last not less than one year».*<sup>20</sup>

In the chapter dealing with «Charity towards neighbour», our Foundress gives reasons for these almost categorical dispositions:

*«...the Novitiate must be lengthy for the Daughters of Charity, as during this period the Sisters must be grounded especially in the interior spirit but also instructed and trained in all things they will have to do when engaged in the various works embraced by the Institute and exposed to all sorts of temptations».*<sup>21</sup>

Magdalene confirms this same principle in the numerous letters she addresses to the Superiors.

These, as they were pressed by the needs of apostolic activity, kept on asking their common Mother for new Sisters to help.

The Foundress wrote these words from Verona to the Superior of Bergamo:

*«With regard to the wish you and others expressed, to have someone to come to help from the Novitiate here, my dear daughter, believe me, unless these complete their novitiate and are well prepared, they may only be a burden and nothing else».*<sup>22</sup>

To her friend Rosimini <sup>23</sup>, who kept insisting to have a foundation in Rovereto, Magdalene writes:

*«...the greater obstacle to this and other foundations ...consists in the shortage of vocations. They keep on asking me for help, but these are only novices, and it takes time before they are really trained... My dearest friend, believe me this is my greatest worry».*<sup>24</sup>

As she was burdened by apostolic needs and the duty to procure a solid formation, Magdalene replies to Monsignor Traversi<sup>25</sup> in these terms:

*«The needs of our people everywhere are so urgent, that many times we are faced with a dilemma either to let souls go without instruction and perish, or to give up the interior formation of the novices who need training.  
I trust in Mary Most Holy who, little by little will do all that I myself am not able to do»*<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., P. Ia, p. 109. M.d.C., U.R., P.2a, p. 78.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., P. Ia, p. 109.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p 50

<sup>22</sup> M.d.C., to Faccioli, 18 January 1826, Ep.. III/2, p. 1305.

<sup>23</sup> cf. p. 25

<sup>24</sup> M.d.C., to Rosmini, 5 September 1821, Ep. III/I, pp. 438-439.

<sup>25</sup> Antonio Maria Traversi (1765-1842): Archbishop of Nazianzo. For biographical notes see Ep. II/1, p. 165.

<sup>26</sup> M.d.C., to Mons. A. Traversi, 23 February 1830, Ep. II/I, p. 170.

To Angela Bragato, the Mistress of novices at that time who shared the worries of the first formation with Magdalene, our Foundress writes:

*«Courage, my dear daughter. God prepares for you a beautiful crown... we know that a great deal is needed to educate young people until they are firmly rooted.. be consoled meanwhile, for the Novlces you have trained are doing very well and serve the Lord and the Institute».*<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> M.d.C., to Bragato, 5 November 1823, Ep. III/I, p. 711.

## 2. CRITERIA AND MODALITY FOR ADMISSION TO THE NOVITIATE

### Criteria

The basic criteria for admission into the Novitiate is rooted in the young person determined to continue on the way of formation and to undertake responsibly her gift of self to God. The Institute on its part, through those responsible for formation, evaluates whether the girl has given adequate proof of being suitable both with regard to her spirit and her capacity to live community life, and to her ability and inclination to serve her neighbours in the works of charity proper to the Institute,

*«...not being able, specifies the Foundress, to retain subjects unable to serve in the field of work in which they will have to be involved ».*<sup>1</sup>

Another requisite which the Institute must consider is the health of the young girl.

*“...since the sickly will not be able to bear the burdens imposed by the Institute».*<sup>2</sup>

An exception could be made if the girl, even though fragile, shows good will and sufficient capacity to be engaged in some manual work, but the Superiors in this case have to be exigent in evaluating the temperament of the young girl so that in the future there are no unpleasant surprises.

Magdalene continues in this tone to warn the Superiors:

*«...the Superiors must not deceive themselves about keeping certain persons engaged in manual work...if they have obstinate and difficult temperaments; neither should they keep those eager for self-esteem or proud because they believe that only they themselves are capable of doing things well; otherwise in time these persons will find themselves discontented when they are required to do humble domestic services”.*<sup>3</sup>

She continues in a convinced and pleading tone:

*«The Superiors will understand that such temperaments are not for the Daughters of Charity».*<sup>4</sup>

A healthy discernment should guide those responsible for formation and if the young lady, for the aforementioned motives is found to be unsuited or not adapted for the Institute.

*«...when it has been adequately proved, without waiting for too long a time, with charity and prudence she should be sent home since it is not advisable to retain a subject when it is known that she cannot ultimately remain”.*<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> M.d.C., RdN., ms., p. 5

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> M.d.C., Rdn., ms., p. 5

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 6

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

The modality for admission into the Novitiate is indicated by the Foundress in terms that respect the freedom of the young girl, and show prudence on the part of the Institute.

Magdalene expresses herself in this manner:

*«The Superior and the Novice Mistress, separately and together, should try in every possible way to see if the novices are really happy, or if they have any human reason which on ges them to embrace this vocation».*<sup>6</sup>

After such an inquiry each one will ask the young girl in the presence of the community, whether she has decided to request admission into the Novitiate.<sup>7</sup>

Only after such a request

*«...will the postulant come under the care of the Novice Mistress, after she has been accepted by ballot».*<sup>8</sup>

At this stage the young girl will be invited to *«...make ten days of spiritual exercises according to the strict method of St. Ignatius».*

The Novice Mistress

*«...having had the opportunity of knowing her thoroughly will be able to be of service to the novice ».*<sup>9</sup>

Of the three stages in the retreat of St. Ignatius, the young girl should be exposed particularly to the unitive or illuminative way. The life of Christ from birth to death will be the dominant themes for meditation in those ten days,<sup>10</sup> so that the young girl may know better the Lord she intends to follow and Inform her life to His.

In the final days, the theme of the Resurrection in which Christ, beyond the conditions of time and space, living spiritually and in the hearts of those who love and welcome him should be considered.

All this is to be regulated, writes the foundress wisely, according to *«what the Novice Mistress thinks best»*<sup>11</sup>

*«The young girl wilt begin this new itinerary, exhorts again our Mother, under the protection of the patriarch St. Joseph, master extraordinary of the interior life which is so necessary for this Institute».*<sup>12</sup>

The Novice Mistress then,

*«...will put her in the hands of our Blessed Lady of Sorrows... with such help, concludes Magdalene, she will see the blessing of the Lord on her ministry».*<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> M.d.C., U.R., P. Ia, p. 111

<sup>7</sup> M.d.C., RdN., ms., p. 6.. 9 10 of Third

<sup>8</sup> M.d.C., U.R., P. Ia, p. 324, RdN., ms., p. 6

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

<sup>10</sup> cf. Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 325.

<sup>12</sup> M.d.C., RdN., ms.. p. 7

<sup>13</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 3iO.

### 3. CONTENTS OF THE FORMATION PROCESS

#### Charity the «vital nucleus»

During the preceding stages of her vocational progress, the young girl who has replied to God's call and has decided to «follow Christ more closely»<sup>1</sup> is now taught to know and experience the consecrated religious life of the Institute which she freely chose.

The Novitiate means for the young girl a period of apprenticeship, during which she examines her conscience more deeply regarding her divine vocation and makes an in-depth study of the «nature, aim, spirit and character of the Institute»<sup>2</sup>, in order to verify that her own identity corresponds to that specifically of the Daughters of Charity.

The maturation of the young girl requires an involvement of the entire person at all levels, human, Christian, religious and charismatic as it comes with the rhythm of growth of each individual.

At the human level, the time of the novitiate serves to strengthen in the novice the psycho-emotional balance which she should strive always to obtain, completely free and capable of being in command of herself and of giving herself. Thus the Foundress expresses herself with regard to emotional consistency:

*«...this vocation requires cool heads and steady temperaments».*<sup>3</sup>

Regarding the capacity to give, she writes:

*«The daughter of Charity... Wives only for the love and honour of God, ministering to all without discrimination, equally and zealously, never in the interests of friendship, family ties, temperament, sympathy or inclination.»*<sup>4</sup>

At the level of Christian and religious life, the novice, through the gift of the Holy Spirit which illuminates and supports her on the path of faith, will try to understand the mystery of Christ through the Word of divine Scripture, which she will have to study, through listening, through personal and community prayer and through the embodiment of life. This time of meditation will be the most suitable and profitable for progress in faith and spiritual life.

The foundress thus exhorts the novice:

*«...develop well and truly the habit of holy meditation, trying to reap real fruit... committing yourself to following the way of close imitation of the Divine Saviour, Jesus Christ».*<sup>5</sup>

At the same time she writes in the treatise of the Mistress of Novices.

*«Having set her on the path and ground her in holy meditation assign to her... those books which you think most adapted to her... make her read them attentively and, so to speak, make her lose herself in what she is reading».*<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> R.o.L. art. 31, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> C.D.C., can 578.

<sup>3</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, 30 March 1822, Ep. III/1, p. 503.

<sup>4</sup> M.d.C. U.R., P. Ia, p. 267.

<sup>5</sup> M.d.C. RdN., ms., p. 9

<sup>6</sup> M.d.C. U.R., P. Ia, p. 326

The way of meditation is for Magdalene the most valid for spiritually consolidating the novice and for progressing in the love of God.

Regarding the method of meditation, as a true mistress of the spirit, she writes:

*«As to the method of teaching her to do it (meditation) I like to follow the method of St. Ignatius with the novice but then, having started her off, I like her to do it her own way and according to how the Spirit of the Lord moves her».*<sup>7</sup>

Because, she continues,

*«God is the master of souls and wishes to lead them in the way He pleases».*<sup>8</sup>

In order to favour real progress in the ways of God, the novice seeks

*«...to cultivate the presence of God by frequent invocations or if she is more advanced in the way of the Spirit, to uniting herself little by little to Him».*<sup>9</sup>

This exercise, once habitual, will allow the novice once she is involved in apostolic work to conserve the spirit of prayer which is a gift more precious than prayer itself.<sup>10</sup>

Also the spiritual lessons given and explained by the Novice Mistress will be a valid means of facilitating in the young novices the spirit of prayer itself. The attention of the Mistress will be to provide spiritual nourishment according to the needs of the persons entrusted to her.

*«...choose, exhorts the Foundress, among the books those that she judges most suitable for the good of each novice».*<sup>11</sup>

The Daughter of Charity is called by a specific charism, transmitted by the Foundress, to read, contemplate and live the spirit of charity which animates Christ on the Cross.

In Christ Crucified Magdalene contemplates not so much the man who suffers, but the God who loves. The infinite charity of God, contained within the heart of the Word made flesh is the reality which transforms the life of Magdalene, like a dazzling «sun»<sup>12</sup> and is the charismatic intuition that characterises and gives to the Institute its specific identity, and distinguishes every daughter

The “*look and do likewise*»<sup>13</sup> is the synthesis which invites every member of her religious family to unify the contemplative and operative aspect of her life.

The Son of God made man loves the Father to the point of identifying himself with the Father,<sup>14</sup> but he also loves man to the point of identifying himself with man.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. 2, P. 75.

<sup>8</sup> M.d.C., U.R., P. Ia, p. 327

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> cf. M.d.C., R.s.s., P.2a, p. 184.

<sup>11</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 328.

<sup>12</sup> cf. Ivi, pp. 345, 360, 365, 369.

<sup>13</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. 1', p. 319.

<sup>14</sup> cf. Gv. 14, a.

<sup>15</sup> cf. Mt. 25, 40.

The passion for God and the passion to save man, is in Christ, one and the same passion. In Him and only in Him, «Magdalene finds the unity of her life»<sup>16</sup> and invites all her daughters to follow in her footsteps.

In charity, «the vital nucleus of the charism»<sup>17</sup> of the Institute, every daughter contemplates and lives, in imitation of Christ, the «ardent love for His Divine Father».<sup>18</sup>

And love for one's brothers to the point of «giving one's own life to the exercise of holy charity».<sup>19</sup>

The same virtues of which our Great Model gave us a special example on the Cross»<sup>20</sup> are interpreted by Magdalene as expressions of charity, which every daughter conforming to the spirit of Christ in sentiments, motivation and interior attitudes, must express in her daily life these three particular virtues: humility, poverty as interior detachment and obedience.

This is why in the first chapters of *the Unabridged Rules*, and in *the Rules for the Novitiate*, as well as the specific treatise relating to the *Mistress of Novices*, the Foundress repeatedly insists on the acquisition of these sDecific virtues.

### Charity expressed as humility

Regarding the virtue of humility, Magdalene exhorts the Novice Mistress:

*«...it cannot be recommended enough to try to instill Holy Humility in the young woman and to see to it that she be well-informed in this virtue».*<sup>21</sup>

The adjective «*holy*» repeated twice indicates that it does not mean the practice of a moral virtue, but a theological virtue. Humility in fact has no sense outside of the revelation of a God who was made man for love.

And after some pages she continues:

*«...aim that the spirit of humility and the love for humility be embedded in the Novice's heart, because the holiness of people who seek for sanctity off the path of suffering and humility is only a chimera».*<sup>22</sup>

And to the novice she recommends,

*«...Although elsewhere in this treatise I have spoken of humility, I recommend again that the novice should have it at heart, more than any other (virtue) next to divine grace... as the greatest of all goods... whoever wishes to receive the divine mercy must root herself in her own nothingness».*<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> D. Barsotti, Dio solo e Gesù Crocifisso, ed. Rusconi, Milano 1985, p.44.

<sup>17</sup> RoL, art. 6. D. 16.

<sup>18</sup> M.d.C., U.R., P. I', p. 22.

<sup>19</sup> M.d.C., R.d., p. 130.

<sup>20</sup> M.d.C., U.R., P. í', p. 2221

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 319

<sup>22</sup> M.d.C., U.R., P. 1^,

<sup>23</sup> M.d.C., R.d.N., ms., p. II.

God makes himself present, there where a person recognises and loves her own nothingness. God cannot fill with divine love a heart that is given over to love of self.<sup>24</sup>

Magdalene who had received the most luminous revelation of this virtue at the foot of the Crucified one knows that all she is, and all that she has is the gift of God the Father, lover of life and who invites every daughter to have «utmost confidence»<sup>25</sup> because He

*«who shuns the proud, pours copious blessings on the humble».*<sup>26</sup>

### **Charity expressed in poverty**

The second virtue seen by Magdalene in the Crucified One and recommended to those who intend to become part of her Institute is *«the spirit of utter detachment aspiring to nothing save God alone»*.<sup>27</sup>

It is the first disposition that Magdalene requires from the young girls even before they enter

*this Institute only those who seek nothing else but the Crucified One should enter»*.<sup>28</sup>

The Foundress is not afraid to propose a very high goal to the girls, right from the initial stage of their itinerary. She does not ask for impossible perfection, but expects a constant tension of love for Christ, who has been chosen as a companion for life.

*«...In the Novitiate, she writes, the novice is to be directed towards a practice of total and universal detachment from all, a virtue that will have to be practiced throughout her whole life, if God gives her the grace to persevere»*.<sup>29</sup>

And after having defined concrete examples of «infantile behaviour» (here Magdalene defines various forms of jealousy among the novices regarding their Mistress), she continues

*«...the novices must believe that they can grow in sanctity even when they lack some part of what is prescribed by the Rules as a means of sanctification»*.<sup>30</sup>

Magdalene was not a woman of compromise. Regarding poverty understood as interior detachment, she expresses herself thus in the Unabridged Rules,

*«...of greatest obstacle to the perfection of divine love is the thought of affection for earthly things... Jesus on the Cross was stripped of everything except love»*.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> cf. M.d.C., U.R. P. 1&, p. 3925

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p. 240.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> M.d.C., R.d.N., ms., pp. 18-19.

<sup>28</sup> M.d.C., R.d.N.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 19. pp. 1-2.

<sup>31</sup> M.d.C., Ross., P. I a, p. 34,

## Charity expressed in obedience

The third virtue, following the preceding two, is the total availability to God in obedience.

After the chapter on Charity, the Foundress, always pointing to Christ Crucified as the example of this virtue also, proposes to her daughters, obedience. And addressing the novices she says that they should allow themselves

*«to be led by obedience as the Clouds allow themselves to be carried wherever the wind wishes».*<sup>32</sup>

And immediately after this not only poetic but evangelical allusion<sup>33</sup> she again proposes Christ as the supreme model:

*“lovingly subjecting herself to obedience for love of Him who was made obedient to the point of death on the cross for us».*<sup>34</sup>

Such virtue should be exercised not only before the Superior or the Mistress but extended to any sister to whom the young novice is assigned.

*“The Superior will probably assign to the Novice Mistress an assistant, ...and every novice should obey her, as they would the Mistress»*<sup>35</sup>

The instructions of the Novice Mistress on the virtue of obedience should be frequent and this virtue should be practised much. <sup>36</sup>No matter what her considerations may be, the Daughter of Charity, like Christ, during her life on earth, will obey God the Father.

*“The novice will go, when the Mistress judges it best, to serve in the kitchen and she will obey the Sister in charge as she would the Superior herself... without hesitating a moment to follow the voice of God which is the voice of obedience... »*<sup>37</sup>

She concludes, addressing the novices again,

*«...obey with love and for love... since it is absolutely necessary that you get accustomed to this virtue as you will have to practice it for the rest of your life».*<sup>38</sup>

And so she exhorts the Mistress of novices,

*«train her to be prompt in every common observance ...to be the attentive guardian of time, since this is something very essential in an Institute, in which those who do not make good use of their time risk missing many spiritual exercises...».*<sup>39</sup>

Love has as its pivot, obedience and as its expression, joy.

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<sup>32</sup> M.d.C., R.d.N., ms., p. 12

<sup>33</sup> cf. Jn 3,7-8.

<sup>34</sup> M.d.C., R.d.N., ms., p. 12.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> M.d.C., U.R., P. Ia, p. 138.

<sup>37</sup> cf. M.d.C., R.d.N.. pp. 8-12.

<sup>38</sup> M.d.C., R. d N .

<sup>39</sup> M.d.C., U.R., P. 1, pp. 325-326; cf. R.d.N., ms., p. 7

*«Profit my daughter from this time of the Novitiate, which if you use well will perhaps be the happiest in your life and know that often a good life style depends on it... for the rest of your days».*<sup>40</sup>

«...the individuals who belong to the Institute», one reads in the Rules approved by Leo XII in 1828

*«of taking away all the obstacles that could be an impediment to uniting herself perfectly with God».*<sup>41</sup>

The novice rooted in this way in the three virtues of humility, of poverty in spirit and obedience, as concrete expressions of charity towards God and neighbour, charismatic virtues proper to the daughter of charity, will be more easily prepared and more desirous of giving herself to God with the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, which the Church today requires as a juridical recognition of the religious Institute of consecrated life.

### **Towards the evangelical counsels**

At the beginning the vows in the Institute were neither solemn nor perpetual:

, *«must observe religious life the whole time they have the vocation to persevere in it».*<sup>42</sup>

Magdalene considers the simple vows as a means

but beyond, the vows, the Foundress requires

*«...great perfection from the members and the work they do».*<sup>43</sup>

in the exercise of the three charismatic virtues proper to the Institute.

Another important element of the religious life is the communal life the novices are required to live

*“...a life of mutual charity and union».*<sup>44</sup>

The communal life which is realised especially in the «communion of faith», gives Magdalene her strength and her continuity from a profound communion with God-made-Love, who makes possible community life.

The source of «real union of hearts» which Magdalene requires from her daughters is Jesus Christ in the Eucharist:

*«Let us take», she writes, «the norm for this charity at the moment in which he recommended it and in the way in which he recommended».*<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> M.d.C., R.d.N., ms.. p. 9.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> M.d.C., U.R., P. 1&, p. 64.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

<sup>44</sup> M.d.C., U.R., P. 1^, p. 243.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p. 94.

Jesus that evening commanded us to love each other as He himself loved us. Only after He had given himself as bread and wine poured out, did he ask of His disciples mutual love:

*«He wanted to signify by this, not only union with him but also the union of hearts that he demands of Christians».*<sup>46</sup>

To the novices as an incipient religious community, the Foundress recommends,

*«Among yourselves, love one another with holy charity and seek to be at peace with one another always; but let this concord and peace be such that they will co-operate towards common sanctification».*<sup>47</sup>

The sense of belonging to the new religious family must not make the novice forget those she left behind to consecrate herself to the Lord. To Magdalene it mattered that such a rapport continue. She herself reminds the girls to write to their parents living far away.

Floriana is slowly convalescing. From Verona, Magdalene writes thus to the Superior of Venice:

*«With regard to this dear girl, I recommend that you make her write to her father, who with his wife is eagerly awaiting even two lines from her. So, make her begin to write a letter to her parents a little each day, in order not to tire her».*<sup>48</sup>

Before the letter reaches the family, Magdalene entrusts the Superior with the task of telling the mother in advance the good news about her daughter.

*«This week Pierina will write to her mother. I assure you that Pierina is well and contented, and that I am also pleased with her».*<sup>49</sup>

And from Bergamo to the Superior of Verona she asks:

*«I pray you to tell my dearest Menighina... that I would like a favour from her, and that is to write again to her mother, as I have not found the letter which I thought I had kept in my luggage.... Tell her that her whole family is well».*<sup>50</sup>

Again on the part of the Superior of Venice she asks for information on behalf of a cousin of Annetta Rizzi who had entered the Institute a few months earlier.

*«Annetta greets all of you, she is well... she asks me to say that she does not know what to think, because she wrote earlier to her cousin but has not received any reply. If you know of anything that has happened or that he is unwell, do call me».*<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> M d.C., RdN., ms., p. 18.

<sup>48</sup> M.d.C., to Terragnoli, 25 January 1827, Ep. III/3, p. 1615.

<sup>49</sup> M.d.C., to Ghezzi, 7 June 1817, Ep. III/I, p. 92.

<sup>50</sup> M.d.C., to Bragato, 6 October 1827, Ep. III/3, p. 1735.

<sup>51</sup> M.d.C., to Terragnoli, 6 December 1829, Ep. III/3, p. 2235.

And when a family suffers a loss, Magdalene hastens to communicate such information to the Superior in order that she may prepare the girl:

*«I received the news from Bergamo of the death of Bettina's father.<sup>52</sup> I Am writing to you so that you can gradually prepare her. I feel that the girl will suffer this loss very much because she was very close to her father so I ask you to be kind to her.<sup>53</sup>*

In doubt whether Rosa's brother<sup>54</sup> has told her of the death of their other brother Carlino, Magdalene writes from Venice to the Superior of Verona;

*«If you have not already spoken about it to Rosa, please do so gently. Tell her that he received all the sacraments and holy indulgences; his confessor and the parish priest testify that he was very tranquil so we all have wellfounded hopes that the Lord has taken him from this valley of tears into eternal repose... Have the uslxal Masses said for him.»<sup>55</sup>*

She herself at times reports on the conduct of the young novices to their families. To Antonio Rosmini she writes of his sister Margherita:

*«...and for your consolation I want to tell you that our dear Margherita, apart from enjoying good health, conducts herself in a manner that is truly edifying and if she continues, as we hope to profit by the mercy of the Lord, we will have the comfort of seeing her a saint soon, and you may be sure that I do not say all this only to pay compliments.»<sup>56</sup>*

### **Mary, Mother of Charity**

Mary is the second love of Magdalene and is the second person after Christ Crucified, who dominates her life.

As Foundress she wished that the whole itinerary of formation be placed under the protection of the Holy Virgin.

In these words she recommends the Novice Mistress:

*«In order to obtain from the Lord more easily the enlightenment necessary to carry out her role well, the Novice Mistress will put it in the hands of our Lady of Sorrows.»<sup>57</sup>*

The Holy Virgin at the foot of the Cross is the creature who more than any other in the world gathers to herself all the wealth of the redemption wrought by the Son of God. Beneath the Cross, more than at any other moment of her life, Mary reached the height of human and divine greatness, «...she is the greatest achievement of the paschal mystery, the greatest both in nature and in grace».<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Elisabetta Nespoli. Per note biografiche cf P., A.C.R.

<sup>53</sup> M.d.C., to Bragato, 15 August 1826, Ep. III/2, p. 1470.

<sup>54</sup> Rosa della Croce, novice. Born in Valtellina in 1801 and died at Venice in 1831.

<sup>55</sup> M.d.C., to Bragato, 24 May 1826, Ep. III/2, p. 1383

<sup>56</sup> M.d.C., a Don A. Rosmini, 8 January 1826, Ep. II/2, p. 799.

<sup>57</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. .la, p. 131

<sup>58</sup> John Paul II. 17 April 1983.

From her «Yes» at the Annunciation to her «Yes» at Calvary Mary lives an increasing faith, interior detachment from personal desires and humble openness to the will of God, but above all in increasing love. Beneath the Cross the heart of Mary reached the dimensions of the heart of Christ.

Just as the Word, writes St. Ireneus, is the measure of the Father, in this way Mary is the measure of Christ.

The Foundress gathers the greatness of the holy Virgin at the foot of the Cross and presents it to her daughters under the title of

*«Mother of Love at the foot of the Cross».*<sup>59</sup>

All the love of the Father contained in the human heart of the dying Son was communicated to the Virgin and all was received by the Mother of God, who became by the will of Christ, Mother of all the living<sup>60</sup> who are in need of salvation after the sin of Adam.

The «look and do likewise» which Magdalene proposes before the Crucified, is implicitly also proposed before the figure of Mary.

When she does not fully know the candidate and her acceptance into the Institute must be decided upon, the Foundress entrusts the care to her beloved Madonna, whom she considers as Mother and powerful intercessor before God.

*«...regarding Mazzi, as you know, I like her, but I do not know her well, and you must know her better than I do. First of all, let the whole community offer three communions in thanksgiving to the Holy Trinity for the graces given to Holy Mary, so that she may obtain for us light and grace, so that if she (Mazzi) is not called, she does not come.»*<sup>61</sup>

During the period of formation, she recommends to the Novice Mistress to instil in the hearts of the nfwvirPC thP rievntion to the Mother of God:

*«Continue to instil in all, devotion to Mary our Mother and all will continue to go well.»*<sup>62</sup>

Most Holy Mary, as at Cana, is always the powerful mediatrix before Jesus:

*«...greet the novices warmly for me and tell them to pray to Mary Most Holy, so that the divine mercy may be promptly granted as it was done at the wedding of Cana in Galilee, not just because we want to see things concluded quickly but for His service and for the glory of God.»*<sup>63</sup>

And the Holy Virgin responded to the insistent prayers of the young novices. Magdalene informs «her little flock» in this way.

*«Know, my dear daughter, that the prayers of the dear novices... begin to have effect. It is likely that I will bring to Verona four girls sent by the Bishop to Verona<sup>64</sup>... Convey to all*

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<sup>59</sup> M.d.C., U.R., P.1', p. 21

<sup>60</sup> cf. LG, 56.

<sup>61</sup> M.d.C., to Bragato, 21 June 1828, Ep. III/3, p. 1954

<sup>62</sup> Md.C. to Bragato, 6 October 1819, Ep. III/I, p. 328

<sup>63</sup> M.d.C. to Rragato, 21 November 1818, Ep. III/I, p. 198

<sup>64</sup> Mons. F. Zoppi, Bishop of Massa Carrara.

*of them the good news and tell them on my behalf that... it is better if they double their efforts because the devil is displeased with the good that is found in that diocese».*<sup>65</sup>

Mary Most Holy is also the powerful advocate before the fiord in the face of assaults of the devil, who tempts young novices especially during the period of the novitiate:

*«...the devil is very busy trying to disturb souls at this time».*<sup>66</sup>

In her contemplation of the two persons on Calvary, Magdalene does not consider the physical passion of Christ, not the spiritual and moral suffering of the Mother, but rather she considers the love in heath

*«...Jesus Crucified, on the Cross was stripped of everything except his love...»*<sup>67</sup>

*«...Mary the Virgin was constituted beside her dying son, Mother of Charity».*<sup>68</sup>

The love of God in the heart of the Crucified and in that of the Mother was the pre-eminent object of contemplation in the heart of Magdalene.

#### *Mediatrice*

As the mother of Charity, Mary for Magdalene was above all the Mediatrice of graces. And as she experienced her in her life, so she presents her in the preface to the Rules:

*«Before beginning the Rules I must make known to you she who has obtained from the Lord the carrying out of this Work».*<sup>69</sup>

For Magdalene, the Institute was a gift of God, obtained through the intercession of Mary Most Holy.<sup>70</sup>

It was to Mary Most Holy that every young girl was entrusted even before entering the Institute.

She writes to the Superior of Milan:

*«In this novena to Mary Most Holy of Sorrows pray much for the Institute, so that the Lord.. may provide... the - candidates to be received .. »*<sup>71</sup>

She writes again:

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<sup>65</sup> M.d.C., to Bragato, 28 March 1826, Ep. III/2, p. 1343.

<sup>66</sup> M.d.C., U.R., P. ID, p. 311.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p. 40

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p. 21

<sup>69</sup> Ibid

<sup>70</sup> cf. M.d.C., a R. Polli, 18 May 1833, Ep. III/S, p. 3363.

<sup>71</sup> M.d.C., to Terragnoli, 28 March 1827, EpIII/4, p. 1633.

*«...I know from experience the strong temptations which the devil puts in front of some of our novices, particularly those from whom we hope more».*<sup>72</sup>

But the Holy Virgin who, according to our Foundress had herself wanted this Institute, will defend each of her daughters from insidious evils. Magdalene is convinced of this and tries to reassure the Superior of Bergamo regarding a postulant who faces strong obstacles in the way of her vocation:

*«Not for nothing does the devil exert himself. He would gain by spoiling the good which this girl is about to do; but he has to contend with a powerful Lady whom he will certainly not overcome»*<sup>73</sup>

Another daughter faced with difficulty is strengthened in this way:

*«...The Institute belongs to God and Mary Most Holy. Let us not leave their company and even if we were to have the whole of hell against us, nobody can defeat us».*<sup>74</sup>

*Model and Mother*

Mary is above all the model of life, and every daughter has the duty to contemplate and imitate her.

After *«the great Example, Jesus Crucified»*<sup>75</sup> the daughter of Charity is called to imitate Mary:

*«...Let us never be separated in spirit from the feet of Mary».*<sup>76</sup>

Mary constitutes the ideal model of true humility, of interior and universal detachment and of total availability to the will of God the Father. Humility, detachment and availability are the three charismatic virtues which Magdalene invites every daughter to live in the Institute.

Magdalene sees these virtues shine especially in the heart of Mary Most Holy, in her interior and universal detachment from all that is not God. From the moment in which the Sacred Scriptures present her to us in the mystery of the Annunciation, Mary lived detached from persons, from things and from her very self.

But the supreme detachment Mary lived was at the foot of the Cross when the dying Jesus detached her from himself announcing her as the mother of John. This would transcend space and time and implicitly declare her Mother of the Church.

Magdalene presents Mary to us in the act of receiving from her Son this universal maternity which embraces a multitude of sinners:

*«She... Mother of Charity at the foot of the Cross gathered all of us, sinners though we are, to her heart».*<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, I December 1822, Ep. III/1, p. 591.

<sup>73</sup> M.d.C., to Dabalà, 21 May 1825, Ep. III/2, p. 1128

<sup>74</sup> M.d.C., to Polli, 18 maggio 1833, Ep. III/5, p. 3363.

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

<sup>76</sup> M.d.C., to Renzi, 5 July 1828, Ep. II/2, p. 1158.

<sup>77</sup> M.d.C.. U.R.. P.la. p. 21.

Here Mary reaches the height of her openness to God.

From the day on which Mary had given him her consent she had been for the Father the living submission, the docile handmaid and faithful servant, the one who was available: «She constitutes the ideal model of love for the Father, union with Christ and obedience to the Holy Spirit, of service to the Church and of love for all men.<sup>78</sup>

The Foundress invites every daughter to conform to this ideal of woman. For this reason she requests that the Superior make the young lady aware even before she enters the Institute:

*«...of the state she is about to embrace... making sure that she understands that the Institute demands total detachment from all that is not God».*<sup>79</sup>

Born on Calvary, maturing at the foot of the Crucified, the Daughters of Charity are called to model their hearts on that of their great Mother:

*«Generous hearts... generous hearts... in imitation of that great heart who on Calvary offered for all the life of her own Son».*<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> John Paul II, 18 January 1986.

<sup>79</sup> M.d.C., RdN., p. 1.

<sup>80</sup> M.d.C., to Renzi, 2 November 1827, Ep. II/2, p. 1155.

#### 4. THE PERSON AND ROLE OF THE NOVICE MISTRESS

The Mistress of Novices is requested by the Institute to assume a role of great responsibility.

*«... in her hands, writes the Foundress, are entrusted the future hopes of the Institute and none more than she can collaborate and maintain constant and unchanged the spirit of the Institute itself ».*<sup>1</sup>

She should be chosen from among the best subjects. A deep interior life is demanded of her. Further, she is expected to be a friendly, welcoming person, cordial, prudent, zealous and capable of listening. She is also expected to have a profound respect for the action of the Holy Spirit, the first, the true and only moulder of persons who are entrusted to her.

The Foundress says:

*“...as on one hand this role of formation is very dear to the Lord, and on the other needs to be continually enlightened by Him, the Sister chosen for this role really needs to be close to God».*<sup>2</sup>

The necessity of this constant and profound communion with God is the condition *«sine qua non»* for the success of the formation of the young girls. And this is because, according to the Foundress, God alone is the master of all his creatures and human mediation must remain docile to the will of the Spirit.

If this quality is lacking in the Novice Mistress,

*“.. every care and precaution would be almost useless if, above all, she does not help herself by prayer».*<sup>3</sup>

The criteria which directed the Foundress to choose the Novice Mistress are as follows: above all she must have great charity and should be virtuous. She thus writes to a priest from Milan:

*«...I will make Torina<sup>4</sup> the Novice Mistress as she is a daughter possessing great virtue, endurance in suffering and immeasurable charity».*<sup>5</sup>

To charity must be added other human qualities and especially a psycho-emotional equilibrium:

*«May God free the Mistress from having or showing deference to any one on account of birth, manner or any other human motive, as it is charity that must regulate everything».*<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> M.d.C., R.d., p. 261.

<sup>2</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 310.

<sup>3</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 311

<sup>4</sup> Tonina Lavagno (1799-1858), cf. Ep. II:1, p. 341.

<sup>5</sup> M.d.C., to Don Burocco, 22 August 1827, Ep. II/1, p. 341.

<sup>6</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 334

Regarding emotional equilibrium Magdalene says in the treatise which deals with the Novice Mistress, elaborating and even descending to particulars:

*«... in any encounter the Mistress must not allow herself, either during this time or in the future, to get too involved in a human-affective relationship with the novices either generally or individually».*<sup>7</sup>

And again she insists:

*«... she must never show the slightest partiality for one rather than another».*<sup>8</sup>

And as an expert who knows the human heart she says that though the Novice Mistress may like some novices more than others,

*“... even if there is one who might merit special affection on account of her virtue, she must not, however, be more lenient with her or give her special attention. While showing approval when virtue is practised, she must be most careful not to allow any gesture or word to escape her that would signify inordinate affection or partiality».*<sup>9</sup>

All this would irremediably compromise the formation and *«would poison the constant and holy efforts of the Mistress».*<sup>10</sup>

As for the role of the Novice Mistress, as a guide who is in charge of formation, she has a definite and indispensable task. To a great extent the attainment of the objectives of the novitiate depends on her.

Her specific responsibilities are varied, exacting and delicate.

Above all, she should teach the novices the method of prayer:

*«...In this encounter... if there are a good number of novices, she will get them to relate how they do their Holy Meditation. This makes it easier for them to do it, as well as forming a mutual relationship and openness of heart in a deep bond of fraternal charity”.*<sup>11</sup>

Even during the daily spiritual lessons and more so during the lectures which she will hold at least three times a week, the Novice Mistress must

*“... try to fin the probationer with compunction rather than hurting her».*<sup>12</sup>

And developing the various treatises pertaining to the Rules and to the spirit proper to the Institute:

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 334.

<sup>8</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p 334

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 142

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p. 330

<sup>12</sup> M.d.C-, U.R., p- 315

*«On some occasions only the Novice Mistress should speak, at other times she should let the Novices speak and even ask questions, this method also being a very valid method for interior formation of the Daughters of Charity».*<sup>13</sup>

What is absolutely necessary is

*«... that they be well grounded in the Fear of God, the beginning of all wisdom».*<sup>14</sup>

Regarding Catechetical instruction, in which the Daughters of Charity should be well prepared in View of the apostolate, the Novice Mistress

*«... for the whole of the trial period and during the Novitiate, should explain it... according to our usual method».*<sup>15</sup>

For the preparation of apostolic life which waits every young girl who wishes to become a Daughter of Charity, the Foundress thus exhorts the novice Mistress:

*«In the novitiate (the Novice Mistress) should give a correct idea of the schools of Christian Doctrine, on the method of instructing and assisting the sick and the dying all according to the Rules and methods of our Institute».*<sup>16</sup>

The task of the Novice Mistress is not only to communicate the rules and regulations of the novitiate but also and above all to be a guide on the difficult and delicate journey.

Interpersonal relationships will be a most useful way of directing each one *«with prudence and sound discernment»* in the ways of the Lord. She thus writes to the Superior of Bergamo, who is responsible for some novices:

*«Listen, my dear daughter, I beg you, as much as you can, help them to grow by listening to them and letting them tell you everything. Don't worry, you will see that by thus treating them the Lord will give us the grace so that everything will go well. In the meantime let Felicita<sup>17</sup> be clothed in the religious habit and we will see how the Lord will make use of her.»*<sup>18</sup>

A precious gift that is expected of the Novice Mistress is that of winning the trust of the young girls so that in unity of heart and intention the journey of personal commitment to the gift of vocation can be made possible.

To this end, the Foundress exhorts the novices to have towards the Novice Mistress

*“... the frankness of children revealing to their guide, their anxieties, temptations, disappointments and worries».*<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 330

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 316

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 318

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>17</sup> Felicita Valsecchi, for biographical notes see Ep. I}I/2, p. 1027.

<sup>18</sup> M.d.C., to Dabalà, 18 June 1825, Ep. III/2, p. 1144.

<sup>19</sup> M.d.C., RdN., ms., p. 9.

All this will draw down upon the young girls divine benedictions. They will be strengthened and made more secure

*«...against the temptations of the angel of darkness, who seeks to work undercover to succeed in his evil plans».*<sup>20</sup>

The Foundress establishes that the Novice Mistress should be helped by some assistants, even if the general direction of the novitiate remains the exclusive responsibility of the former. She thus informs a priest from Milan:

*“... I will make Antonietta,<sup>21</sup> the Novice Mistress in charge of overseeing things and of the general direction, but I will put Angelina<sup>22</sup> with the novices during the day as she has winning ways and is full of the spirit of God».*<sup>23</sup>

Also for the work, if the Novice Mistress is not capable of teaching the novices she can ask the Superior for the help of another sister in the house.<sup>24</sup>

But with this sister and with all her assistants, the Novice Mistress should be

*«... in perfect harmony seeking only the greater good of the novices».*<sup>25</sup>

This union of intention is indispensable for formation and favours in a concrete way the value of each Person. co-responsibility and fraternal charity.

The Novice Mistress should not only avail herself of the collaboration of the sisters, but with prudence and discretion keep them informed, coordinate their interventions and promote a favourable outcome for the benefit of each and every young novice.

Magdalene also has concrete and wise advice for relations among those who are responsible for formation:

*«...if the Novice Mistress disagrees with her assistant about something, then she must not show that she thinks differently in the presence of the Novice, but point it out to her when they are alone».*<sup>26</sup>

Such understanding favours the unity of formation, guarantees that the work is agreed upon by all and reveals to the young a profound and concrete love for Christ, source of true unity. The Spirit of the Institute can survive and grow only if it is rooted in charity.

With Angela Bragato, Superior at Verona and Novice Mistress since 1818, Magdalene has frequent exchanges of correspondence. After she had first resisted such a heavy responsibility, the Mother from Venice encourages her and comforts her inviting her to place her trust in the Lord:

*«Only two lines... my dear daughter, to console you. Rest assured that I am not displeased with you; neither was I when I left. However, it is very true that as I desire more than any-*

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid pp. 9-10

<sup>21</sup> Antonietta Cocchignoni (1783-1842) governess of Countess Mellerio of Milan. Entered religious life in 1822. Until her death she covered the roles alternatively of Novice Mistress and Superior.

<sup>22</sup> Angelina Vimercati (1804-1835), entered the Institute in 1821 and was assistant Mistress of Novices and wardrobe mistress.

<sup>23</sup> M.d.C., to Don Burocco, 22 August 1827, Ep. II/I, p. 342.

<sup>24</sup> cf. M.d.C., R.s.s., P.I<sup>^</sup>, p. 140.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>26</sup> M.d.C., P. Is. P. 141

*thing else in this world the sanctification of the Institute and consequently of all of us, I do not like to see you resist anything. Trust in the Lord, faith in obedience will help even if you feel the weight a little. Embrace it not only with tranquil resignation, but also cheerfully. Believe me, it sometimes seems that it is due to humility to reject certain responsibilities but often it is due to a seeking of personal convenience and expedience. Anyway, we will not talk about it again. Be contented in everything and be assured that with God's help I will make use of you as the Lord enlightens me, all for His service and glory. I embrace you and leave you in the heart of most Holy Mary».*<sup>27</sup>

Magdalene is the animator of the Novice Mistress and again she adds some words of encouragement, full of faith:

*«...take courage, for the responsibility you have taken on is not something you have chosen yourself but it has been given to you by God through obedience and He will sustain you in it».*<sup>28</sup>

The prolonged absence from Verona throws Angela into anxiety. So Magdalene thus encourages her:

*“You worried me a bit as in your letter you say nothing about your novices. Be assured that in order to help you regain your good spirits, I will try to return as soon as possible... Remember, when you are in trouble, go to Most Holy Mary».*<sup>29</sup>

Magdalene often sustains her with true and deep esteem:

*«...I hold you very dearly and I have always done so... so calm yourself and know that I consider you as one of my dearest daughters which you really are...»*<sup>30</sup>

After receiving reports of the Novice Mistress regarding the young girls under formation, Magdalene replies:

*«I feel breath consoled to know that you are happy with the conduct of all the novices May God Bless them and protect them; more, I hope He will make them holy and this wish is also for you so that you may find your comfort in the midst of your labours».*<sup>31</sup>

To fears arising from not knowing how to give spiritual guidance to a novice who is especially gifted, Magdalene in a tone full of humour writes:

*«I don't know my dear daughter how you came to imagine that you are not capable of guiding her. The thing is so ridiculous that I cannot wait for my return to tell you what a beautiful dream it is. Farewell Angelina, full of stories!».*<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> M.d.C., to Bragato, November 1818, Ep. III/I, p. 191.

<sup>28</sup> M.d.C. to Bragato, 20 November 1819, Ep. III/I, p. 261.

<sup>29</sup> M.d.C. to Bragato, 1819, Ep. III/I, p. 312.

<sup>30</sup> M.d.C., to Bragato, 6 October 1819, Ep. III/I, p. 328.

<sup>31</sup> M.d.C., to Bragato, 13 March 1821, Ep. III/I, p. 409.

<sup>32</sup> M.d.C., to Bragato, 13 August 1825, Ep. III/2, p. 1177

## 5. EVALUATION FOR ADMISSION TO THE RELIGIOUS CLOTHING

The passage from the first to the second year of the Novitiate in the time of our Foundress took place without a robing ceremony. As in every other decisive phase, the novice verifies her own free and responsible decision, to continue an oblation of love for Christ, according to the spirit and mission of the Institute, within the context of community life, which requires capacity of self-giving and fraternal collaboration.

The Institute on its part determined if the young girls

*“were resolved to embrace this vocation... to obey the rules with the will to persevere in it with constancy”.*<sup>1</sup>

At every stage of formation, Magdalene required a serious evaluation on the part of all responsible and consequent voting. In an extract regarding the services it establishes:

*“In the case when they are found unsteady, not really contented or much convinced about the practice of the Rules, they should by no means be allowed to take the habit”.*<sup>2</sup>

Again it specifies, when some negative elements are noticed...

*«which are open, clear and evident, (the Superiors) should send them home... in proper manner».*<sup>3</sup>

The proper manner is thus explained:

*«Everything... should be conducted with holy charity, discretion and prudence, so that everything may lead to the glory of our Lord and God, our Most Holy Mother Mary and the good of the Institute».*<sup>4</sup>

Again she adds:

*«...if their dispositions are doubtful, let them defer taking the habit and making the vows until those in charge can judge for certain whether the Novices are called to the Institute or not».*<sup>5</sup>

To Don Burocco she writes:

*«...I am not convinced about admitting novices to the robing ceremony about whose happiness and conduct I am uncertain of».*<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> .M.d.C., ., R.s.s., P. Ia, p.. 71

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 112.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> M.d.C., to Don Burocco, November 1834, Ep. II/I, p. 361

Not even the fact that the young girl is contented and decided on her path are sufficient signs for Magdalene that the Institute should admit her to the robing ceremony. She should be sent home to her family, she writes:

*«...in spite of how content and persuasive they may be... if their behaviour does not correspond to their desires and their words...».*<sup>7</sup>

Every now and then in correspondence Magdalene encouraged the Superiors to rid themselves of candidates who were not appropriate. She writes thus to the Superior of Milan:

*«...abandon yourself my dear daughter to the will of God, do not insist too much on your part that Angelina should remain, because it would be cruel charity to keep a girl who is a trouble to the house and is discontented... since it is no sin not to have a religious vocation».*<sup>8</sup>

And since the novices who returned to their homes were left without any means or sustenance, Magdalene is consoled when the Superior communicates how the girl would be provided for in the future.

*«with regard to Angelina, I am much comforted to hear that her friend Somaglia would be prepared to give her what would have been passed to us when she leaves. You can do as you have told me so that the girl may have some support and sustenance...».*<sup>9</sup>

With regard to another girl, whose uncertainty about her vocation in the Institute had deferred the robing ceremony, Magdalene wrote thus to her mother,

*«our common desire has always been that she be admitted to the robing ceremony with the moral certainty that she would always remain content in the Institute so it seems to me prudent that we allow the time prescribed by the Rules to elapse before the robing ceremony, so as to allow greater experience to mature her determination... ».*<sup>10</sup>

To Count Bedeschi, father of one of the young ladies, Magdalene is concerned that he be disposed to welcome his daughter back home without any recriminations:

*«...You have always desired that your daughter follow the Divine Will... at first when she was with us she was quite happy. However, following her entry into the Novitiate, she began to be extremely troubled by doubts and inner conflicts which alternated with moments of calm followed by new storms. I myself am uncertain as to whether this could be due to temptations or a lack of a vocation and all the while, though I continued to sustain her, she inclined to the idea of leaving rather than remain without a calling... Shortly after a visit from her brother she wrote telling me that she realized she had made a mistake regarding her vocation, and that she desired to return to her family, adding however that*

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<sup>7</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 112.

<sup>8</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, 7 May 1820, Ep. III/I, p. 360.

<sup>9</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, May 1820, Ep. III/I, p. 4009.

<sup>10</sup> M.d.C., to the countess. Bedeschi, 1824, Ep. III/2, p. 947

*she would leave her vocation to my judgment.. I do not wish to make such a decision ...I hope that you will write encouragingly to her... and prepare your self as you think best for her return...».*<sup>11</sup>

Of this painful return to the family, prepared 'with much compassion and goodness, Magdalene informed the Novice Mistress in this way:

*“My dear daughter, our dear Giovannina... has left us in all friendship intent on helping us to start a house at Tirano and to live as one of our collaborators, but so far as I know she is going to be married. I tell you this for your peace of mind » .*<sup>12</sup>

Resolved with perfect charity, to eliminate those that were not called or suited to the Institute, the Foundress started another formative programme for those who were suitable to apprenticeship for apostolic life. But even at the end of the first year of training Magdalene required that the young girls do the Spiritual Exercises, as programmed:

*«At the end of the period of the Novitiate, the novice will make ten days of Spiritual Exercises according to the exact system and method of St. Ignatius to prepare herself for working and strengthening herself on the path she has undertaken...».*<sup>13</sup>

While the Spiritual Exercises of the previous stages had the objective

*«of preparing the young girl to receive the grace of God...»*

with regard to the period of the Novitiate, this was meant instead

*«to prepare herself for work.»*

This expression clearly refers to the apostolic field which is suited to the inclinations and capacity of each person. After the Spiritual Exercises, the Novice

*«will take the habit of the Institute and continue her novitiate, which will not be shorter than one year».*<sup>14</sup>

At the time of our Foundress the robing ceremony was completely private and carried out only «in the presence of the sisters». Such reserve was for the following reason:

*«On account of the many occupations of charity, the Institute may not adopt certain holy practices embraced by other Holy Institutes».*<sup>15</sup>

Even though private, the robing ceremony had the air of a family feast.

To the Superior of Venice she writes:

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<sup>11</sup> M.d.C. to co. Bedeschi. 1824, Ep. III/2, VD. 954-956.

<sup>12</sup> M.d.C., to Bragato, 25 December 1824, Ep. III/2, p. 1012.

<sup>13</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 332. 14

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>15</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 109.

*«...the young girls are eager for the habit... tomorrow I will make nine begin the Spiritual Exercises. You can imagine what a celebration it will be, being the Vigil of Christmas».*<sup>16</sup>

For the occasion, she invited Margaret Rosmini to Verona, who a year later would request to enter the Institute as a Postulant:

*«...what a wonderful thing that she should come to this celebration of the Daughters of Charity, which will be as splendid as it can be within our possibilities».*<sup>17</sup>

To the Superior of Bergamo, she jokingly says:

*« The celebration will make the world tremble.»*<sup>18</sup>

Again to her, some days later she says:

*«...when I come, I will tell you in detail about the whole ceremony of this solemnity. Meanwhile I can say that those for whom the feast is being held are full of joy... an evening of rejoicing in this house».*<sup>19</sup>

The robing ceremony of Margaret Rosmini, some years later was communicated with a tone of maternal satisfaction.

*«...God willing, I will leave for Trent with dearest Rosmini. Yesterday evening there was the robing ceremony for her to the great joy and consolation of the entire community».*<sup>20</sup>

The Foundress among her many preoccupations found time to write personally to a novice anxious to receive the religious habit from her own hands. It is worthwhile to present the whole letter which she wrote from Venice to calm her Caterina.<sup>21</sup>

*«Two lines only, my dear daughter, since I am very busy at this moment with the retreat of the ladies. I am writing to you until they hear Mass, so as not to lose this chance. I am very glad that by the time you receive this letter you will have begun your retreat with your Mistress for the robing ceremony and when I come I will give you the holy habit. If I have to leave before you have finished the retreat I will give you the habit and you will continue and finish the exercises later. If you finish before I arrive, I will give you the habit immediately on my arrival, which is to say not that same evening but immediately after. Abandon yourself, my dear daughter, to root yourself firmly in the loving heart of Mary, our Mother. Do not fear anything and prepare yourself to work for the divine glory. I embrace you in my heart, united to your Mistress and all your Novitiate companions, and I*

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<sup>16</sup> M.d.C., to Terragnoli, 14 December 1823, Ep. III/I, pp. 735-736.

<sup>17</sup> M.d.C., to Rosmini, 15 December 1823, Ep. III/I, p. 738.

<sup>18</sup> M.d.C., to Dabala, 21 December 1823, Ep. III/i, p. 743.

<sup>19</sup> M.d.C., to Dabala 24 December 1823, Ep. III/1, pp. 744-745.

<sup>20</sup> M.d.C., to Terragnoli, 19 February 1826, Ep. III/2, p. 1318.

<sup>21</sup> Caterina Carminati (1800-1882). Entered the Institute in 1823. For some years she was the Foundress' nurse. Alternately, ViceSuperior and Superior in the House at Bassano founded by her.

*put you in the arms of Mary, under whose protection you will make your spiritual exercises. I am yours affectionately, my dear daughter, Magdalene of Canossa».*<sup>22</sup>

As regards the formative stage, until the end of the first year of the Novitiate, Magdalene does not communicate, officially at least, to the bishops information regarding the young girls. The reason is given to the Superior of Trent, who asked clarification regarding the subject:

*«When the girls enter, they do not immediately enter the Novitiate; when the matter is agreed upon and complete, probation is made in every office so that they may see if they can adopt the method and practices of the Institute. Similarly during this period, the Institute sees if the girls are suitable and capable of serving in it, according to what is required and prescribed by the Rule. This being the case, the presentation of the girls to the Bishops I believe, should be reserved for the time when the girls have had some experience and when the Institute knows if the girls have the basic requisites and the required health. The Bishop can then, by himself or through the Spiritual Father, decide to examine the vocation, and if he approves, the balloting will take place and then the robing ceremony. This is the method I feel is practised by other religious and desired by the Church.»*<sup>23</sup>

A month later, she specifies the time when the novices should be made known to their respective bishops.

*«when the time for the robing ceremony draws near, and it is time for them to do a more for mat novitiate, representation is made to the bishop»*<sup>24</sup>

To all Superiors responsible for the novitiate she recommends:

*“It is understood that everything be conducted with Holy Charity, discretion and prudence so that everything may lead to the Glory of Our Lord and God, our Most Holy Mother Mary and the good of the Institute.”*<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> M.d.C., to Carminati, IS May 1825, Ep. III/2, p. 1121.

<sup>23</sup> M.d.C., to Rosmini, 27 July 1831, Ep. III/4, p. 2852.

<sup>24</sup> M.d.C., to Rosmini, 28 July 1831, Ep. III/4, p. 2880.

<sup>25</sup> M.d. C. UR P. 1: Internal discipline-“On the reception of the Novices”.

## 6. SHARING OF APOSTOLIC LIFE

In contrast to the first year of the Novitiate, commonly called canonical, in which the novices are trained in the works of charity, during the second year,

*«...they are to be employed as the other sisters, but remain under the direction of their Mistress. . . »*.<sup>1</sup>

The continual dependence on the Mistress, while providing for a continuity in the formation, allows the young girls to share with the sisters of the community, the apostolic life proper to the Institute.

In these words Magdalene stresses the double advantages for the young novices; the guidance of the Novice Mistress in the second year will allow them

*«...to reaffirm and ground their resolutions and intentions and to put into practice... what they will learn in the first year of the Novitiate...»*<sup>2</sup>

The second advantage is that while the novice is gradually inserted into the apostolic work, the Novice Mistress will continue

*«...to watch over her conduct with the same attention as if she were under probation... being required to strive for utmost perfection during this concluding period of the novitiate... »*.<sup>3</sup>

With regard to community life, Magdalene invites the Novice Mistress to encourage a climate of coresponsibility and fraternal communion, of profound respect and appreciation for every sister, and exhorts the novice to

*«...be subject to all the sisters, happy to be considered the least of all and ready to adapt to every temperament»*.<sup>4</sup>

The apostolic activities are offered to the young girls with the intention of fostering and providing opportunities for a gradual unity of one's own spiritual life, community and apostolic life.

The vigilant eye of the Mistress will observe that

*«all be done in such a way that this is not an obstacle to the novice's growth»*.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. 1<sup>^</sup>, p. 141, n. 31.

<sup>2</sup> M.d.C., R.d.N., ms., p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 333.

<sup>4</sup> M.d.C., R.d.N., ms., p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. 1', p. 139.

While being involved in the apostolic work, the Foundress however is concerned that

*«the novice consolidate her spirit of recollection, which she tried to acquire during her Novitiate, so that her gaze be fixed on God while she carries out His work»*<sup>6</sup>

The spirit of Charity of Christ Crucified, which the young girls should be endowed with according to the charism of Magdalene, should be the sole motivation of their every apostolic service.

If the novices are occupied in the school,

*«they will have occasion to show the Lord true love by exercising more patience than in any other branch of charity»*.<sup>7</sup>

If they are involved in the branch of Catechesis, their task is

*“to make Jesus Christ known, as He is not loved because He is not known»*.<sup>8</sup>

If they are involved in visiting the sick, they will acknowledge, in the light of faith,

*«that they are going to visit the very person of Jesus Christ»*.<sup>9</sup>

In such works of charity, Magdalene recommends that the novices behave as persons

*“who are not concerned with anything but and His Divine Glorv»*.<sup>10</sup>

The Foundress follows each novice individually in her spiritual and apostolic progress.

To the Superior of Milan she writes:

*«Rachelina conducts herself very well... it is not that she does so well in school, but she performs her duties well and is a real angel in everything. She seems to be contented and happy and indeed I believe she is 50»*.<sup>11</sup>

And to the Superior of Bergamo she says:

*«For our dear Teodora, I did not doubt that she would do well in school»*.<sup>12</sup>

When anyone manifests difficulty in facing the girls in school, Magdalene puts her to work as an assistant to another who is already experienced:

*«...I will continue to pray to the Lord that He show us His Holy Will. But before deciding, I would put her in the school, not as a teacher but to assist Pierina, to see if her*

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<sup>6</sup> M.d.C.. R.d.N.. ms.. pp. 13-14.

<sup>7</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 119.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 163.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>11</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, 28 September 1821, Ep. III/I, p. 443

<sup>12</sup> M.d.C.. to Dabalà. February. Ep. III/1. p. 486.

*difficulties are a childish affair or if they are real, and eventually, we will think of what should be done».*<sup>13</sup>

To the Mistress of novices she communicates,

*“Nunziatina<sup>14</sup> always conducts herself so well that we do not know what else we can ask for; she is a great help in school, in Catechetical instruction doing all that she can ...In Bergamo she behaved prudently with the girls and did a world of good».*<sup>15</sup>

A novice had also assisted in the residential seminars, held in various houses of the Institute. Magdalene communicates to Don Zanetti who was asking for information on behalf of the Carminati family, who had given their daughter to the Institute, but had not heard from her since she says:

*«...Cattina Carminati conducts herself well and is very contented To tell the truth, I have never forbidden her to write to her mother... I attribute her neglect to her dedication to the work she is doing as assistant mistress to the country girls in the company of Christina pi Iotti, as I see her, I would say, so joyous in this activity».*<sup>16</sup>

One girl was invited to assist the Ladies during the days when the Foundress would follow them personally in their spiritual exercises, but the thought that the journey to Milan, could jeopardise the already delicate health of the novice, made her decide to depart alone.

*“Our dearest Isabella<sup>17</sup> is doing really well and excelling in virtue. She gives herself generously to others and is a good example to her companions. I would have brought her here<sup>18</sup> with me so that she might come to know this branch of the Spiritual Exercises for Ladies, for which I am here now; but finding her peaceful and contented in the novitiate, I spoke of it, but did not oblige her to accompany me because of the inclement weather and also because I would have to stay at our house at Bergamo on the way there and back where the weather is freezing cold».*<sup>19</sup>

In the voluminous epistles which the Foundress addresses to the Superiors of the different houses to communicate the various types of information, she condenses some of her judgments on the young novices:

*«Pierina Moro<sup>20</sup> continues to improve.<sup>21</sup> Our young girl from Bergamo shows more and more uprightntess and maturity of thought. May God bless her».*<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> M.d.C., to Romini, 13 January 1822, Ep. II/I, p. 468.

<sup>14</sup> Annunziata Caccia.

<sup>15</sup> M.d.C., to Bragato, S March 1823, Ep. III/I, pp. 618-619.

<sup>16</sup> M.d.C., to Don Zanetti, 10 January 1827, Ep. II/I, pp. 434-435

<sup>17</sup> Isabella Ferrari, for biographical notes see Ep. I, p. 542.

<sup>18</sup> Milan.

<sup>19</sup> M.d.C., to Renzi, 16 March 1827, Ep. II/2, pp. 1152-1153.

<sup>20</sup> Pierina Moro (1778-1832) born in Venice, entered the Institute in 1816, teacher, Superior at Bergamo. Died in Verona.

<sup>21</sup> M.d.C., to Chezzi, 28 March 1817, Ep. III/I, p. 69.

<sup>22</sup> M.d.C., to Rosmini, 28 December 1823, Ep. III/I, p 750.

And again to another Superior,

*«she seems to be angelic in her ways, steady, docile, capable of good judgment and ability... to attend to the needs of others».*<sup>23</sup>

In this way she writes to Margaret Rosmini,

*«I have the satisfaction of giving you good news about our two novices. Their Mistress has written to me and says that even Teresina has made great improvement».*<sup>24</sup>

And of Maria<sup>25</sup> a very active novice from Bergamo, she writes:

*«Maria is well... she is happy, you will not recognise her anymore. But if she is to remain happy it is better that she keep busy. I assure you that I am amazed to see her so happy and easy-going».*<sup>26</sup>

She had jokingly written of those from Bergamo a few years before,

*«...before receiving people from Bergamo I would like them to undergo three hundred years, three months and three days of probation».*<sup>27</sup>

But at a distance of five years, she eulogises more than one of them.

And at the conclusion of this comforting profile of the novices, Magdalene pays a compliment to the Novice Mistress, Angela Bragato:

*«.. what a capable Novice Mistress!».*<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Md.C. to Bernardi, 9 July 1824, Ep. III/2, p. 896.

<sup>24</sup> Md.C. to Rosmini, 18 June 1821, Ep. III/1, p. 433.

<sup>25</sup> Maria Mortelini (1808-1833) entered in 1828.

<sup>26</sup> M.d.C., to Faccioli, 28 June 1831, Ep. III/4, p. 2835

<sup>27</sup> M.d.C. to Bragato, 5 April 1826, Ep. III/2, p. 1347.

<sup>28</sup> M.d.C. to Bragato, 21 November 1818, Ep. III/1, p. 198.

## 7. EVALUATION FOR ADMISSION TO THE FIRST PROFESSION

As for every preceding phase, at the end of the novitiate the young girl will evaluate herself to see if the experience of life made in the first two and a half years in the Institute is in accordance with the plan of God for her. She will also see if she wants to commit herself to the Lord with the vows of obedience, chastity and poverty in the spirit proper to the Family she has freely and responsibly chosen.

The Foundress is quite decisive about this phase of formation and says:

*«...before each vote is cast on the novices they should be made to weigh everything well».*<sup>1</sup>

And as a consequence of this personal evaluation. follows:

*«let... permission be given to those who are not happy to leave».*<sup>2</sup>

On the part of the Institute too, the persons who are responsible for formation are subjected to inquiry as to the suitability of the novices.

*«...I recommend you not to be deceived... not to allow yourself to believe... that those who are not suitable for this Institute can be admitted On the contrary, there is not, perhaps, any other Institute which requires greater vigilance, caution and reserve than ours».*<sup>3</sup>

With more clarity and synthesis she thus establishes in one of the articles of the Rules:

*“These first three years will be a trial period on both sides. During this time the Novices may be sent home not only if they are found unsuitable for the duties and aims of the Institute or if their temperament is not adapted to it, but also for reasons of poor health».*<sup>4</sup>

The first profession is the act by which the young girl commits herself to Christ and shares with Him her life of chastity, poverty and obedience, observing faithfully within the Institute what is specific to her spiritual and apostolic charism, to become in the Church a visible witness to the charity of Christ in the world.

All the members of the Institute should be responsibly aware of this and have the obligation to evaluate carefully the various moments of formation of the young girls.

This is also the motive for the prolonged period spent in the novitiate. Thus the Foundress insists:

*«No candidate is to be allowed to make her first profession unless she has completed six months of probation and at least two and a half years of novitiate».*<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 111

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> M.d.C., U.R. p. 111.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>5</sup> M.d.C., Piano dell'Istituto, cf. Ep. II/2, p. 1431. Nella Regola diffusa così è precisato: il noviziato «resta fissato a tre anni, compresi i sei mesi della prova», (M.d.C., R.s.s., P. 1a, p. 50)

The “at least» takes into consideration the possible prolongation of the novitiate beyond the times normally established.

The rhythm of spiritual growth differs from person to person much more so than the rhythm of biological growth. With such a principle as the basis, the Foundress establishes that the period of novitiate can be prolonged.

*«...for a time longer, as the Superior thinks suitable for some»<sup>6</sup>*

Sometimes the delaying of the Profession ceremony is not only for reasons of spiritual maturity, but also for unexpected breakdowns in health. Then the Foundress searches for a remedy suitable for each case. Before admitting to profession the young girl, Floriana<sup>7</sup> who was suddenly taken ill, Magdalene makes it possible for her to have a change of air and to give her extra nourishment. With humour, she says to the Superior of Venice, whose maternal care for the sick, she knows well:

*“Let me tell you... make her eat. you are very much in favour of diets and if you could you would live only on air like the Camaleonti (monks) but I like to be fattened like capons».<sup>8</sup>*

The novice would later be admitted to Profession and would remain in the house of Verona until 1853, the year of her death.

For another novice, after attempts had been made to improve her health, Magdalene advises her to return to her family, assuring her through her Superior that she is prepared to accept her into the Institute again if she recovers:

*«...assure her, on my behalf, that if the Lord gives her the grace to recover perfectly and if she perseveres in her vocation, I will have no difficulty in accepting her again».<sup>9</sup>*

If there are no motives which present obstacles or delay in the admission of the young girl to the first profession, the novice will prepare herself to make the act of total gift to Christ with the vows of obedience, chastity and poverty in the spirit proper to the Daughters of Charity.

After the young girl has explicitly asked to become an effective member of the religious Family she has chosen, the Institute will carry out the juridical act of admission:

*«...the Novitiate completed, the Novice will again be voted on. If accepted she will make her vows in front of the Superior in the presence of her Sisters.»<sup>10</sup>*

The Spiritual preparation immediately preceding this event consists of ten days of Spiritual Exercises.

*«At the end of the period of the Novitiate, the Novice Mistress will help the Novice to make another ten days of Spiritual Exercises according to the exact system and method of St. Ignatius to prepare herself for her holy Profession and strengthen her in the work she has undertaken».<sup>11</sup>*

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<sup>6</sup> M.d.C., R.s.s., P. 1°, p. 140-141.

<sup>7</sup> Floriana Demassari: for biographical notes see Ep. III/2, p. 1274.

<sup>8</sup> M.d.C., to Terragnoli, 3 December 1826, Ep. III/2, p. 1548.

<sup>9</sup> M.d.C., to Faccioli, 25 August 1830, Ep. III/4, p. 2492.

<sup>10</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 109.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 332.

Committing oneself to follow Christ through the profession of vows is a goal and at the same time the beginning of a life which knows no aim but that of identifying with Christ Crucified as a gift of Charity to her brothers, similar to that made by her Lord.

*«...the novitiate is the first phase and what might be termed the childhood of spiritual life... after that it is necessary to grow in vie toe everyday striving for true perfection».*<sup>12</sup>

As the young girl, a Daughter of Charity, now begins her religious life as «a consecrated apostle» she still remains dependent for some time on the Novice Mistress so that she can consolidate her identification with Christ and grow in her sense of belonging to the Institute.

This is what the Foundress has established:

*«Although the Novice becomes one of the Sisters from this moment, nevertheless, she will remain in the care of her mistress... for not less than six months, after which period.. she will receive the Tableau containing the picture of Mary Most Holy to wear around her neck».*<sup>13</sup>

And she concludes:

*«...all must be done according to the Spirit and the Institutions of Holy Mother Church».*<sup>14</sup>

The Church is the Mother who has welcomed and approved each Institute, and the Institute, incorporating the young girl, and by consecrating her makes her belong more and more to Christ and the Church.

The specific vocation of the new Daughter of Charity is that of living in «the wound of Christ». She is called to breathe in His Heart the same charity, and to give herself to the world

as the light that shines<sup>15</sup>

as the water that gushes out<sup>16</sup>

as the leaven that ferments the dough<sup>17</sup>

as the salt that prevents corruption<sup>18</sup>

as the seed that dies to give life<sup>19</sup>

as the branch that bears fruit<sup>20</sup>

as the fire that burns<sup>21</sup>

as the lamb that lives amidst the wolves<sup>22</sup>

allowing herself to be immolated to give life and eternal happiness to all.

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<sup>12</sup> M.d.C., R.d.N., ms., p. 16

<sup>13</sup> M.d.C., U.R., p. 110.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 71

<sup>15</sup> cf. Mt 5,14

<sup>16</sup> cf. Jn. 13,20.

<sup>17</sup> cf. Lk. 13,20.

<sup>18</sup> cf. Mt. 9,50.

<sup>19</sup> cf; Mk. 4.25

<sup>20</sup> cf. Jn. 15,4.

<sup>21</sup> cf. Lk. 12,49: Acts 2.3.

<sup>22</sup> cf. Lk. 10.3.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

### *Sacred Scripture*

Mk. = Mark  
Jn. = John  
Lk. = Luke  
Mt. = Matthew  
Gal. = Galatians  
Jas. = James

I Cor. = Corinthians

Eph. = Ephesians

2 Tim. = Timothy

Documents of the Church

C.D.C. = Code of Canon Law

Unione editori cattolici italiani, Roma, 1983

GS = Gaudium et spes

LG = Lumen gentium

PP = Populorum progressio

RC = Renovationis causa

### *Documents of the Institute*

4.C.R. = Archivio Canossiano Roma.

Ep. = Maddalena di Canossa: Epistolario

F.d C = Figlie della Carità

M.d.C. = Maddalena di Canossa

R.d. = Regole dell'Istituto delle Figlie della Carità, 1820, testo diffuso, Milano, 1978.

R.o.L. = Rule of Life, Institute of the Canossian Daughter R.s.s. = Maddalena di Canossa,  
Regole e scritti spirituali

P. 14 e 2a, ed Pisani Isola del Liri, 1984/1985.

R.d.N. = Regole del noviziato, ms.

U.R. = Magdalene of Canossa, Unabridged Text Milanese manuscript, Rome 1981

cf. = compare

ms/mss = manuscript/manuscripts

p/pp. = page/pages

P. = part

Q. = quaderno

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