

## DOCUMENTATION SERIES

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### MAGDALENE OF CANOSSA : FOUNDRRESS

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MAGDALENE  
OF CANOSSA  
HER LOVING SERVICE  
TO THE SICK

Rome, February 1996

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## FOREWORD

This volume draws from the writings of the Foundress (letters, plans, Rule, edited by E. Dossi), which are a precious documentation on the third ministry of charity: Pastoral Care of the Sick.

It follows the structure of the two volumes of this series concerning the ministries of education and evangelization-catechesis: “Magdalene of Canossa - Educator” and “Magdalene of Canossa, Catechist of Her Time”.

The author, M. Nicolai, after presenting the problems of the hospitals at Magdalene of Canossa’s time (end of ‘700- early ‘800), describes the Spirit’s work in the heart of men and women moving them to bear fruit by beginning a new, favourable initiative for the sick in the hospitals” (Pious Union of the Ladies Hospitaliers).

One of these witnesses of God’s love was Magdalene of Canossa who gradually acknowledged “her genius” for the sick as one of the “perennial and continuous ministries of charity.

This volume offers the Sisters engaged in the ministry of the Pastoral Care of the Sick precious guidelines for research and reflection on the sources and stimulates to deepen further this ministry of charity.

It provides us also with the opportunity to capture how this service is relevant today, as we are confronted by the challenges of our time, so that we may become as creative as Magdalene and proclaim that life is sacred and must be promoted till the end.

M. Elide Testa  
Superior General

## INTRODUCTION

Charity was the sound foundation on which Magdalene of Canossa built her whole life. It follows that care for the sick, helping the suffering brother/sister, could not be missing. For a Christian, in fact, it is not an optional activity, but one's response to a mandate; it is a sign of one's identity and that by which a true disciple of Christ is recognized.

When searching for her true vocation, Magdalene's firm standpoint was: to devote herself to the poorest, including the sick. Magdalene defined such a flair: "*a special natural genius for the sick*".<sup>1</sup>

In fact, the young Marchioness, after experiencing cloistered life twice (1791-1792), understood that "*in such a place I would no doubt sanctify myself, but I would never be in a position to prevent sin, nor to work for the salvation of souls*".<sup>2</sup>

She perceived also that "*a mystical experience could be lived even in the midst of action: an action filled with charity and sacrifice*"<sup>3</sup>, that is, being "*in the world with the heart of a discalced*".<sup>4</sup>

Before founding the Institute, she spent her life in sacrifice and prayer at home, with her family. She became very sensitive to the needs of her dear ones who were sick and of the greatest number of the people of Verona, whose living standards were very miserable. In fact, the French Revolution, first, then the spreading of Napoleon's despotic attitude and the unchecked ambition for power which exploded during the Restoration, had filled cities and villages with poor.

At the sight of this anonymous, neglected and also forgotten mass of people, Magdalene realized how precarious the conditions of the sick in hospices and hospitals were. Filled with zeal, she employed her energy and money to alleviate suffering and prevent deviations. Through her solicitude, some girls were saved from deviance and placed in a safe place. She was urged by her zeal, deeply-rooted in her temperament and strengthened by evangelical charity, to be at the service of the most sickly hospitalized in the poorest hospitals in Verona, where weakly motivated persons assisted them, making the hospital inhospitable.

A small group of people, filled with the love of God and neighbour, raised their voice and solicited concern and help for the most needy sick, crowding the small and unhealthy rooms of the hospitals where they were little or ill-assisted.

Even Magdalene of Canossa responded generously to the appeal. She joined wholeheartedly the "Sacred League of Priests and Lay Hospitaliers", took care of the poorest sick and contributed to spread the Plan of the League to other towns.

In 1808, she began the Institute of the Daughters of Charity in St. Zeno's district, but her great desire to help the poor sick materially and spiritually did not dwindle.

When drawing up the Plans of her Work and drafting the *Rules*, Magdalene included the visits to the Hospitals as a field of action to be privileged by her Daughters.

In fact, in the preface to the "Rules for the Hospital", she wrote:

*"It cannot be denied that too much would be lacking in an Institute that enjoys bearing the name of Charity and that tries to practise this in many ways, if it lacked this special exercise of visiting and assisting the sick in hospital, as these people are in such a pitiable situation and great need of comfort."*<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> MAGDALENE OF CANOSSA, *Memoirs*, edited by E. Pollonara, Rome 1988, p.35

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 318

<sup>3</sup> VECCHI A., *La dottrina spirituale di Antonio Cesari* in Chiesa e Spiritualità nell'Ottocento italiano, Editrice Mazziana, Verona 1971, p. 170.

<sup>4</sup> LIBERA L., *Letters of spiritual direction to M.d.C.*, edited by. A. Cattari, 19 November 1793, p.30

<sup>5</sup> M.d.C., *Rules for the Hospital*, U.R., p. 158

First Part

MAGDALENE  
OF CANOSSA:  
HER FLAIR  
FOR THE SICK

## CHAPTER 1

### THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY AT THE END OF XVIII CENTURY AND EARLY XIX CENTURY -

#### Milan

In the XVIII Century Milan entered the Austrian orbit. Even though more improvements were made than under the previous Spanish rule, with regard to ecclesiastic matters, however, the policy of Maria Teresa first, and above all that of Joseph II, later, was characterized by jurisdictionalist theories and praxis; it was not a lay, but a strongly religious jurisdictionalism which claimed to dictate to the Church in the Empire, methods and times for internal reform.<sup>1</sup>

In 1780, after the Empress Maria Teresa's death, her son, Joseph II, proclaimed the prevalence of the State over the Church. Ecclesiastical authority was no longer consulted and the field of civil competence was unquestionable.

Cardinal Joseph Pozzobonelli<sup>2</sup> was powerless when convents and monasteries giving priority to prayer were considered useless to social progress, because they had no schools, were not involved in assisting the sick and in pastoral ministry.

In March 1782, in Milan only, 6 male convents and 20 female convents were suppressed. The government confiscated their goods. The expelled religious, who were free either to return home or to join other convents, were allotted a very modest pension. In the other convents the intake was restricted. There was government control on any person admitted to clothing or profession, which could not be taken before 24 years of age.<sup>3</sup>

Again in 1782, when Card. G. Pozzobonelli was still alive, Joseph II issued an edict, claiming for himself the right to elect the Archbishops of the diocese under his domain and granting the Pope only to confirm the Emperor's decision.

"The hurricane of the French Revolution, especially during the Jacobean phase, damaged greatly the Ambrosian Church. The situation improved a little at Napoleon's time, which was also characterized by a firm, minute State control on religious life in order to turn it into an < instrument of the government >.

In this conflictual time, Milan suffered the loss of its shepherd: Cardinal Caprara<sup>4</sup>, archbishop from 1802 to 1810. In fact, he was always absent from his diocese because Pope Pius VII put him in charge of the difficult task of dealing with Napoleon on ecclesiastic and religious matters. Thus, up to July 1818 - when Msgr. Carlo Gaetano Gaysruck<sup>5</sup> took over the Diocese of Milan - the Milanese Church was run by the General Vicars".<sup>6</sup>

After Napoleon's fall, the final decisions of the Congress of Vienna brushed off the Milanese patriots' hopes for a certain autonomy. When the provisional Government was dissolved,

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<sup>1</sup> CF. PIPPIONE M., *Chiesa e Società nella Milano della Restaurazione (1814-1848)*, in *"Maddalena di Canossa e la Chiesa di Milano"*, NED 1990, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Pozzobonelli Card. Giuseppe was born in Milan in 1696. In July 1743 he was consecrated bishop and in August he was elected Cardinal. He headed the Milan Diocese from 1744 to 1773, when he died.

<sup>3</sup> MAJO ANGELO, *Storia della Chiesa Ambrosiana*, vo. III, NED, Milano, pp.121-122.

<sup>4</sup> Caprara Montecuccoli Card. Giovanni Battista: was born in Bologna on 29 May 1733. He furthered his ecclesiastic studies in Rome. In 1755 he took a degree in utroque iure. In 1765 he was ordained a priest and in 1766 he was nominated archbishop of Iconio. Pope Piu VII nominated him Legate a latere for Paris. In 1802 he nominated him Archbishop of Milan. He died in Paris in 1810.

<sup>5</sup> Gaysruck Msgr. Carlo Gaetano : was born in Klagenfurt in 1769, in Carinzia. Ordained priest in 1797, 4 years later he was consecrated bishop of Derben. He was nominated Archbishop of Milan in 1816, but entered Milan officially on 26 July 1818. He died in 1846.

<sup>6</sup> PIPPIONE M., o.c., p. 23.

Milan was ruled by a Governor who was nominated directly by Vienna. Every little political, social, religious decision depended on the royal government of Austria."<sup>7</sup>

During the Restoration, Austria became the main power whose policy on Church matters was connected directly with the tradition of Joseph II and Napoleon and, therefore, was based on a strong State control on the Church.

When Lombardy was given back to Austria, the Emperor Francis I hurried to render lawful the ownership and the sale of ecclesiastical goods confiscated during the revolution and declared, at the same time, that it pertained to the government to nominate new bishops and to finally approve the nomination of the parish priests. Government approval was needed also for priestly ordinations, ecclesiastical promotions, clothing and professions of male and female religious and even for the spiritual exercises.

Yet, the same government had declared officially the Catholic religion as the dominant religion in the State and considered the bishops as natural protectors of any welfare or charitable Institution.

In May 1818, Francis I decreed that the Religious Institutes destined by the Church and the State to the instruction and education of youth, the assistance and education of orphans, infirm and poor would be permitted to work. They would be subordinate to the local Bishops. A special privilege was given to the useful male and female religious.<sup>8</sup>

The Institute of the Daughters of Charity, recently founded by Magdalene of Canossa was one of them.

## Venice

From the end of 1700 to early 1800, the "Serenissima" lived through a difficult historical period. Though it was on the decline, the Venetian Government proclaimed the jurisdictional statements which the French and Austrian Enlightenment suggested to all the European sovereigns.

In fact, from 1767 to 1768, during the Patriarcate of Msgr. Giovanni Bragadino<sup>9</sup> (1758-1775), various laws were issued as an expression of an accentuated jurisdictionalism, like prohibition of sending money out of the Republic, prohibition to the Bishops of leaving their own seat without government permission, suppression of various monasteries and convents.

The situation did not change during the episcopacy of his successor Federico Maria Giovannelli (1776-1800)<sup>10</sup>, the last Patriarch of the "Serenissima". Venice began what, in a very concise way, was called "the evening agony of the Republic". Such agony was concluded by the arrival of Napoleon's troupes in Italy.<sup>11</sup>

Political upheavals had a bearing at social, spiritual and religious levels.

In 1797, Napoleon's era, the sluggish Venetian Republic was started, but it fell the same year with the Treaty of Campoformio when Napoleon handed over Venice to Austria. Thus, a new world begins for the lagoon city. After a few years of Austrian power the town was handed over to Napoleon who incorporated it into the Italic Kingdom.

The Church in Venice experienced dramatic events under Napoleon's power: suppressions, deprivation of patrimony, culture and masterpieces and also Government interference.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 23.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. PIPPIONE M., o.c., pp.26-29 ff.

<sup>9</sup> Bragadino Msgr. Givani: was born in Venice in 1699. He was ordained a priest in 1726. He was named bishop of Verona in 1733, in 1758 the Venetian Senate chose him as Patriarch of Venice. He died in Venice in 1775.

<sup>10</sup> Giovannelli Msgr. Federico Maria: was born on 26 December 1728. He was from a noble Venetian family. He studied at the Benedictine Academy of Erthel in Bavaria. Then he went to the Roman Jesuit College. He was ordained a priest. In 1773 he was consecrated bishop of Chioggia. In 1776 he was chosen Patriarch of Venice. He died on 10 January 1800.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. TRAMONTIN S., *Sguardo d'insieme su novant'anni di storia*, in "La Chiesa veneziana dal tramonto della Serenissima al 1848", Ed. Studium Cattolico Veneziano 1986, pp.11-12.

One of the first decrees by Napoleon launched the concentration of religious orders and their goods were confiscated by the State Property Office. Also the parishes decreased. There were 69 of them, but they became 40, then 30. There was also a joint administration for any kind of charitable institutions.

With the fall of Napoleon, the new Austrian government confirmed most of the radical changes made by the Napoleonic regime to the ecclesiastical structures. The Venetian Church of the Restoration was challenged with the problems of a deeply changed society. Population had diminished and been impoverished, instead the number of patients in hospitals and hospices had increased.

“The Austrian Government moved slowly through a bureaucracy and was able to settle somehow the chaotic and still anachronistic world of the institutionalized assistance. However, it did not respond to the many needs brought about by poverty”.<sup>12</sup>

The “Case della Pietà” and of the “Zitelle” and the orphanages at the Gesuati and Terese were brought back to their objective; for economic purposes, the number of helpers at the Ca’ di Dio, at the Penitents and the Catechumens had decreased.

There were many vacancies in the field of helping the poor, the chronically sick, the marginalized. However, after a painful process, the Civil Hospital and the Rest House<sup>13</sup> were settled in a dignified manner.

The Austrian Government, too, followed the criterion of utility to society, which was widely implemented during the Enlightenment and brought back the “religious corporations” suppressed by Napoleon. Religious were helpful to the State when they engaged themselves in the instruction, education and help of the orphans and sick.

Such were the charitable institutions of the Cavanis brothers and of St. Magdalene of Canossa.

## Verona

By the end of the XVIII Century Verona was considered one of the richest and most industrious cities of the Republic of Venice. Verona itself, which until then had been overshadowed by the “Serenissima”, was the centre of the French invasion and suffered the heaviest blow.

In June 1796, the French entered Verona carrying their cannons. Within the town and in the outskirts, the French and the patriots raised the trees of freedom with grand demonstrations and for the sake of brotherhood, freedom and equality, they did all kinds of evil and robbery.

Besides the order was given to care for the great number of wounded people and troops struck by epidemic fever.

The Churches of St. Bernardine and St. Eufemia, the convent and the Church of St. Fermo and St. Anastasia were turned into military hospitals.

Suffering and indignation filled the hearts of the people to the point of frustration. Thus discontentment burst into the sorrowful event of the Veronese Easter.<sup>14</sup>

In April 1797, the enraged crowd gathered in the squares shouting “Long Live St. Mark” against France. This event became an excuse for Napoleon who used “lawfully” Venice and its territory as a very good piece of barter at Campoformio. On 25 April 1797 the fall of Venice was proclaimed officially and the Democratic Municipality headed by the Jacobians was instituted. The old Venetian institutions fell and the Patriotic Society was born. Its special activity was carried out in the “Public Instruction Hall”.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> BERTOLI B., *La Chiesa veneziana nel clima della Restaurazione*, in “*La Chiesa veneziana dal tramonto della Serenissima al 1848*”, Ed. Studium Cattolico Veneziano 1986, pp. 94-95.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. BERTOLI B., *Chiesa società stato nel Veneto della Restaurazione*, Vicenza 1985, pp. 156-206.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. CASETTA G., *Il Servo di Dio Don Carlo Styeb, Fondatore dell’Istituto delle Sorelle della Misericordia di Verona*, Città del Vaticano 1964, p. 55.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. FASANARI R., *Il Risorgimento a Verona (1797-1866)*, Verona 1958, Part.1.

On 17 October, however, the whole territory of Venice, up to the river Adige, was handed over to Austria with the treaty of Campoformio. The hope of many Italians was dashed and the Veronese land was divided in two sections.

In Verona, half of the town belonged to the French and half to the Austrian for five years; the innovative ferments “were drastic and tried to uproot, together with old institutions, any civil and moral order. It was as if a compressor was passing over the city to squash any seed of private and public initiative causing each source of income to dry up. This caused a terrible economic situation and provoked a still worst morally depraved situation where there were constant attacks to the conscience of the citizens and to the freedom of the Church in its various religious organizations and divine authority”.<sup>16</sup>

Sommacampagna wrote: “It is enough to see that dishonesty and irreligion were everywhere: very scandalous books were printed, priests apostatized, purely civil marriages were celebrated next to the tree of freedom, many erroneous and heretic statements were diffused, priests were mocked, ecclesiastical goods were sold”.<sup>17</sup>

Bresciani, an eye-witness, wrote:” The one who remembers the end of the last century recalls at the same time the immense fall of many pious Institutions and many Establishments of public welfare founded by charity”.<sup>18</sup>

In 1805 the French resumed fighting in Verona and chased the Austrians away. The situation in the city became more dramatic.

By the peace of Presburg (26 December 1805) the Veneto was handed over to France and joined to the Kingdom of Italy.

In March 1806 Napoleon, by a decree, established that the reforms brought about in France were to be implemented in the Kingdom of Italy as well.

In fact, in Verona, first the number of parishes was reduced, and then all the goods of the religious were confiscated by the Government and the Convents were concentrated.

Therefore, the early 19th Century was a difficult time, torn by wars, epidemic diseases, famine and persecutions in the whole of Lombardy-Veneto. Even if after the year 1807, there are some peaceful periods, in Verona, anxiety and fear persist up to the year 1814, when after Napoleon’s fall, the Austrians enter Verona.

The Church, during the Austrian dominance, was officially respected, but experienced a subtle policy attempting to make the town serve its purposes.

Verona, however, at the end of the 18th Century and first half of the 19th Century became a centre of spiritual renewal: a small group of courageous persons, one of them Magdalene of Canossa, helped a marvellous complex of works to blossom with the intent of providing to the numerous needs of a humanity which was suffering and disoriented.<sup>19</sup>

Also the reinstatement of the Religious Orders was a good start for a wider catholic restoration, though in reviving the suppressed religious Congregations only those connected with social activities were considered.

Regarding public charity, the writer Count Ignatius Bellavite Lazise, Imperial Royal Councillor of the Government, concluded his “*Saggio d’una Statistica della Città di Verona*” as follows: “ If Italy preceded other western nations in creating stable institutions to the relief of afflicted humanity, Verona, is proud of being one of the cities where these beneficial fruits of the revived and widespread Christian religion and of the growing civilization blossomed right from the beginning”.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> DALLE VEDOVE N., *Vita e pensiero del B. Gaspare Bertoni agli albori dell’800*, Roma 1975, Pt. 1, pp. 7-8

<sup>17</sup> Mss Sommacampagna, Envelop 114, Verona Civic Library.

<sup>18</sup> BRESCIANI C.C., *Vita di Don Pietro Leonardi, sacerdote veronese, missionario apostolico, Fondatore della Congregazione delle Figlie di Gesù*, Verona 1855, p. 44.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. CASETTA G. o.c., p. 66

<sup>20</sup> Bevilacqua Lazise Count Ignatius, *Saggio d’una Statistica della Città di Verona*, Venezia 1825, p. 65, B.S. V. VR.

## CHAPTER 2

### **HOSPITAL ASSISTANCE IN VERONA AND THE “SACRED BROTHERHOOD OF HOSPITAL PRIESTS AND LAY PEOPLE”**

At the end of the XVIII Century hospital assistance in Verona was rather poor. Only six out of thirty small hospitals which were rendering a service in town in the XVI Century, were still functioning at the end of the XVIII Century.

The main one was the Hospital of Mercy which had been opened in 1515 through the intervention of James Anthony Ferrari, a Mantuan by birth and a maker of swords.<sup>1</sup> It stood near the Arena, certainly on a spot which was not the best for the city. It was enlarged in successive stages, but it was always inadequate to the needs, due to the frequent epidemic diseases, as the wards were small and poorly ventilated.

The nursing staff were few and offered little service. In fact, the male nurses came “from a mostly rough class of people, low and worn out by fatigue, a nuisance and intolerant, and sometimes using a loose and arrogant language, drunkards and consequently sleepy. At that time they used to say: the dregs of the powerless and the wayward go to assist in the hospitals”.<sup>2</sup>

The situation of the Hospital of Sts. James and Lazarus, which welcomed the scabbed, was not any better. Neither was that of the House of Mercy, which welcomed persons at risk.

Even spiritual assistance was much neglected because often the priests were not appreciated. They were not lacking, but their status was unknown and they felt “discomfort and frustration because of the reluctance and neglect of the other people.”<sup>3</sup>

With the pressing events which shook the XVIII Century, the few hospitals left, being deprived of the last resources, could not support themselves any longer. The war aggravated the situation as the economic situation was generally impoverished, the seeking of alms had increased, diseases were spreading among the numerous soldiers, and there were countless wounded people.

Time was favourable for the reforms. The Governments tried to centralize everything and suppressed whatever they deemed to be superfluous.

During Napoleon’s rule, “by the 31 July decree, the Government invited the Municipality to propose a plan associating all the hospitals of the city so as to provide for the greatest good of the People”.<sup>4</sup>

By the 25 November 1797 decree, therefore, the sick were gathered in the Hospital of Mercy, because they said that the times had changed and that the hospitals of Sts. Cosma and Damian, St. Bovo, St. James of Galizia, the Hospital of Mercy in St. Paul, of St. Maria of Valverde and St. Catherine in All Saints,” did not respond any more to their objectives. Their income, therefore, had to be assigned to the Hospital of Mercy in Brà. The Health and Food Stuff Committees established that all the hospitals mentioned above be abolished and suppressed, and that their goods, Funds, Houses, Churches, Capitals, Levels, income, furniture, sacred furnishings... had to be handed over to the Major Hospital of Mercy which was the only one left to succour so many unhappy persons”.<sup>5</sup>

Subsequent political events and the change of Governments interrupted the implementation of the decree to unite the hospitals; the Veronese Church, however, always open to respond to the needs of its people, continued its charitable action along the centuries.

Among the various charitable institutions the following deserve mention: the Charitable

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<sup>1</sup> Regarding the *Casa della Misericordia* see: Fainelli Vittorio, *Storia degli ospedali di Verona dai tempi di S. Zeno ai giorni nostri*, Verona 1962, pp. 157-165.

<sup>2</sup> BRESCIANI C.C., *Vita di Don Leonardi...* o.c., pp. 34-35.

<sup>3</sup> BRESCIANI C.C., o.c. p. 29.

<sup>4</sup> FAINELLI V., *Storia degli ospedali...* o.c. p. 266.

<sup>5</sup> FAINELLI V., o.c., p. 269.

Society founded by the Bishop John Matthew Giberti<sup>6</sup>; two Congregations of Knights and Ladies (from aristocracy), promoted by the Filippini in the year 1600 and devoted to the assistance of the sick; the Congregation of Charity (1738), supported by Bishop Bragadino,<sup>7</sup> whose objective was to render a gratuitous service to the sick so as to make up for the deficiencies of the Hospital and many other initiatives and institutions, which tried to respond always to the greatest need of charitable assistance to the people.<sup>8</sup>

However, the 1700's was rightly the most interesting period for the tradition of the Veronese charitable assistance, "because, for the first time the experience of many centuries was collected and reflected upon. ...In the XVIII century, the Institutions aimed, often, to complete and settle the work they had previously started. There were problems about patrimony, about organizing charitable funds, and the need for adequate services to respond to the needs of the people. That compelled the people responsible for the hospitals to review the work carried out and to advance proposals for reformation".<sup>9</sup>

In this atmosphere, in 1796 the "Hospital Fraternity of Priests and Lay People" was born. It was promoted by Don Peter Leonardi<sup>10</sup> to provide for the sick.

The Fraternity seemed to carry out a very significant voluntary service in the hospitals, considering the historical times and the political situation of Verona,<sup>11</sup> then.

The people's conscience was disoriented by the news and the upsetting social structures and needed an earnest religious commitment.

The first biographer of Don Peter Leonardi wrote that "Don Peter knew very well the hard conditions the religious administration of the hospitals was going through and, though he was still young and frail in health, began reforming radically the spiritual service to the poor sick in the hospital, giving also quite an amount of material help."<sup>12</sup>

Certainly, with this work Leonardi did not solve health problems. In fact, the Fraternity was really small compared to the needs. He started the work with five priests and some seminarians and later the lay people, men and women, joined them.

Don Peter's co-workers were: C.C. Bresciani,<sup>13</sup> who was still a seminarian, Don Charles Steeb<sup>14</sup> and the Marchioness Magdalene of Canossa.

The members of this Pious Union were auxiliary helpers to the always limited number of male and female nurses and Chaplains, who, tired for night-watch and fatigue, could not succour the needs

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<sup>6</sup> Msgr John Matthew Giberti: was born in Palermo in 1405. In 1515 he was called to Rome by his father to begin a career in the Apostolic Curia. Pope Clement VIII chose him as a Datary in the Roman Church. On 8 August 1524 he was elected Bishop of Verona. He died at the age of 48 years, on 30 October 1543.

<sup>7</sup> Msgr. Giovanni Bragadino: cf. note n. 8, Chapter 1.

<sup>8</sup> BRUSCO A., *P. Camillo Cesare Bresciani*, Milan 1972, p. 63.

<sup>9</sup> GALLIUS D., *Introduzione alla storia delle fondazioni religiose a Verona nel primo Ottocento*, in "Chiesa e spiritualità dell'Ottocento italiano", Verona 1971, p. 258.

<sup>10</sup> Leonardi Don Peter: was born in 1769 from Francis and Ursula Fusari, tenth of twelve children. He began learning grammar with his parents, then he went to the school next to the Seminary. In 1794 he was ordained priest. In 1796 he founded the "Sacred Brotherhood for Priests and Lay Hospitallers"; in 1809 he established the Congregation of the Daughters of Jesus. He died in Verona in 1844.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. VACCARO L., *Maddalena di Canossa e le "Dame del Biscottino"*, in "Maddalena di Canossa e la Chiesa di Milano", NED, Milan 1990, p. 41.

<sup>12</sup> BRESCIANI C.C., o.c.p. 29.

<sup>13</sup> Bresciani Camillo Cesare : was born in 1783 in S. Peter of Legnago (VR). In 1799 he entered the College of the Acolites in Verona. He was ordained priest in 1806 and was a teacher up to the year 1828. In 1801 he enrolled himself in the Brotherhood. In 1828 he became Don Leonardi's successor as spiritual Director of the Hospice and of the Hospital. In 1842 he called to Verona the Congregation of the Regular Clerics Ministers of the sick (the so called Camillians) and founded their Lombardy-Venetian Province. He died in 1871.

<sup>14</sup> Steeb Don Charles : was born in Tubinga from Lutheran parents. He was sent by his father first to Paris, then to Verona to learn languages and be trained in commerce. In 1792 he was converted and renounced being a Lutheran. In 1796 he was ordained priest.. He devoted himself to assisting the sick. In 1840, together with Sr. Vincenza Luisa Poloni, he founded the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy, to care for the Hospitals. He died in 1856.

of the sick, especially of the most seriously ill and the dying.<sup>15</sup>

At the beginning, the members of the Association were accepted only in order to provide for material services. Then, in the 2nd August 1797 meeting, as the number of sick increased, they accepted the gratuitous service of priests and seminarians so as to cater also for the spiritual and physical needs of the sick.<sup>16</sup>

The Sacred Fraternity was approved by the Bishop of Verona, Msgr. G. Andrew Avogadro<sup>17</sup> on 23 August 1797 with a praise-filled speech. He was happy that “by divine grace, a voluntary service was offered by a Pious Union of Citizens, Priests and Lay Clerics, a real consolation for us, a means for assisting the sick”.<sup>18</sup>

The Bishop granted rights to the members of the fraternity and established that this Union should be free of bonds and follow only the rules and customs which are more suitable to the Institute, so that it may escape partly the police control; he encouraged parish priests and ecclesiastics to join the Fraternity and he himself enrolled as a member.<sup>19</sup>

On 31 August 1797, also the Municipality accepted and approved this Pious Union which, being geared to the assistance in the Hospital of Mercy<sup>20</sup>, was useful to the Government. In fact, the Sacred Fraternity was first acknowledged by the Civil Authority in 1797 and a second time in 1801. Thus, while all the other Sodalities fell under the devastating democratic spirit, the Sacred Fraternity was spared.

Don Peter Leonardi, moved by ardent faith and a deep Christian vision of life, thought of enlarging the Fraternity with “Night-Helpers”<sup>21</sup>. He instituted them in October 1797, soon after the lay people were also accepted as members of the Union. Each of them was on night service once or twice a month.

The Plan of the Fraternity was spelled out in six points: purpose of the work, organization, goal, means for reaching the goal, objectives and replies to queries.

“The work was and still is motivated by the special needs considered, not only the spiritual as such, but, as much as possible, also the physical needs of the poor sick in hospitals. The patients vary according to the circumstances, and their faith likewise. The weak are encouraged; those frustrated are comforted, and helped to trust; the obstinate and impenitent are helped towards conversion and penance; broken marriages are restored and sons brought back to their parents; and especially women of low morals are taken off the streets and helped to follow freely the right path of salvation...”<sup>22</sup>

The members of the Fraternity cared also for the sick discharged by the Hospitals. Don Leonardi and his collaborators were aware of the limitations of the initiative by which they could not reach all the sick.

Many, once out of the hospital, could not afford their livelihood: “Many poor and abandoned boys and girls, after having regained their health, as soon as they are out of the hospital were roaming along the streets; many young ladies, as they have neither support, nor material help,

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. BRUSCO A., o.c., p. 58.

<sup>16</sup> A.S. Vr., Municipality, Civil Hospital, E. 12 (cf. Manfredini M., *L'attività di Don Pietro Leonardi (1769-1844) per la fondazione delle Scuole di Carità in Verona*, Bologna 1971 (unpublished), p. 22.

<sup>17</sup> Msgr. J. Andrew Avogadro: was born in Venice in 1735. At 18 he entered the Jesuits' Novitiate in Parma. He was ordained priest in 1763. After the suppression of the Society of Jesus, he settled himself in Verona. In 1790 he was elected Bishop of Verona by Pius VI himself. In 1804 he withdrew from the Diocese and re-joined the Society of Jesus. He died in Padua in 1815.

<sup>18</sup> A.C.V. Vr., Charitable Places, Hospital, Hospice of St. Silvester.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. CHRISOSTOMUS OF CITTADELLA G., *L'amore operativo. Il Servo di Dio D. Pietro Leonardi, sacerdote veronese (1769-1844)*, Verona 1952, p. 61.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. A.S. Vr., Municipality, Civil Hospital, E. 12.

<sup>21</sup> There are 3 lists of names of the “night -helpers” in A.P.L.V. 1801 list, Fasc. 1064/2bis and in A.S. VR. Archives of Charitable Places, 1802 and 1805 list, 2nd folder

<sup>22</sup> *Piano Generale dell'opera istituita nella città di Verona col titolo di Sacra Fratellanza de' Preti e Laici Spedalieri*, Verona 1803, pp. 5-6 (A.F.G.).

not even for a few days, go to the inns and get their livelihood by committing sins...”<sup>23</sup>

Seeing how boys and girls were abandoned, Don Peter Leonardi felt urged to care for the boys and began the Institute of the “Raminghelli” and the Marchioness Magdalene of Canossa, on her part, began to care for the education of poor girls of St. Zeno district.

In the Plan of the Fraternity we read: “To take very good care of persons in moral danger as they leave the hospital; the objective of the Fraternity or of any pious Union could be to care for the poor vagrant boys and girls. We have to notice that our Work as a Society did not commit itself to such a task; yet one of our brothers, a priest (Don Pietro Leonardi), and a Sister, a noble Lady, (Magdalene of Canossa), separately from the Fraternity, have established two private Places for Retreat, that is, houses for sheltering and educating this kind of youth...”<sup>24</sup>

The writer Dante Gallio wrote in this regard: “...among the members of the brotherhood, both, Leonardi and Magdalene of Canossa ( who may be called the founders) have begun and perfected a new work for the poor and the schools of charity; hospital assistance has been newly organized by Don Camillus Caesar Bresciani and Don Charles Steeb, who provided for its stability and efficaciousness by calling to Verona the Camillian Fathers and founding the Sisters of Mercy.”<sup>25</sup>

On 24 June 1812, the Hospital of Mercy, through the work of the Brothers of the Fraternity, was moved from its old headquarters in Piazza Brà to the suppressed Monastery of St. Anthony dal Corso (presently Via Valverde).

In 1928, C. Bresciani was called to replace Don Leonardi as spiritual Director of the Hospice and of the Hospital of Verona.

This experience was very decisive for the future orientation of C. Bresciani’s life and work as reformer of the Camillian Order.

In his letter dated 25 November 1837, C. Bresciani, wrote to the Bishop of Verona, Msgr. Joseph Grasser,<sup>26</sup>: “During the nine years I have been directing the Civic Hospital and the Hospice, I came to know the needs of these two houses. I have noticed that it would be very useful to establish a religious Order which, also by profession, cares for the spiritual direction of these two big families”.<sup>27</sup>

It was C. Bresciani’s wish not only to visit the sick, while living outside the hospital, but also to serve the sick by living in the hospital, through a complete service, substituting the Chaplains and the lay nurses.

After much deliberation and thought, he opted for the Congregation of St. Camillus.

On 24 January 1842, an imperial decree was signed. It authorized the foundation of the new house for those ministering to the sick in Verona.

Thus, C. Bresciani continued the charitable heritage of the Fraternity in Verona as St. Camillus had continued that of the Society of Divine Love in Rome.

This new foundation of the Province of the Lombard-Venetian Region of the Congregation of the Regular Clerics Ministers of the sick (the so-called Camillians), through Fr. Camillus Caesar Bresciani, was established sixty years after the closing of the houses of the Order in the Lombard-Venetian Region.

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<sup>23</sup> General plan of the Brotherhood, o.c. p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>25</sup> GALLIUS D., o.c., p. 260.

<sup>26</sup> Msgr. Joseph Grasser: was born in Val Venosta in 1762. He studied in the Seminary of Merano, then belonging to the Diocese of Coira. In 1809 he was professor of Latin in the Seminary of Bressanone. He was consecrated Bishop of Treviso in 1823. In 1829 he became Bishop of the Diocese of Verona. He died in 1839.

<sup>27</sup> BRESCIANI C.C., to Msgr. Grasser, 25 November 1837, in A.C.V.Vr. B. Camilliani; (Cf. also Brusco A., o.c., p. 80).

## CHAPTER 3

### **THE PIOUS UNION FOR CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES: AN EXAMPLE OF LAY VOLUNTARY SERVICE IN MILAN IN THE EARLY XIX CENTURY**

At the end of the XVIII Century and in the early XIX Century, Milan was hit by a series of social and political upheavals which shook its solid religious foundations.

After the claims of Joseph II for the right of jurisdiction, there followed the Jacobean and Napoleonic thunderstorms.

Poverty and beggary became a daily event; as a consequence, there was a lowering of moral conscience.

A trend of agnosticism came from beyond the Alps. It spread through books and leaflets which influenced people of a certain educational stand, among whom a unruly moral freedom was fashionable.<sup>1</sup>

At the end of the XVIII Century, right there in Milan, was born the idea of setting up a “Pious Union for Charity and Welfare” in the traditionally catholic area open to charitable activity. It was a natural extension of the people’s religious experience - like that of the “Christian “friends” men and women who were trained to become aware of the changed conditions by the concern of some religious and noble ladies.

When this association began, much collaboration went on between the Barnabites, in particular Fr. Felice De Vecchi,<sup>2</sup> and some members of the Christian Friendship of Milan, for instance, the sisters Trotti (Caroline<sup>3</sup>and Teresa<sup>4</sup>) and Don Charles Riva Palazzi.<sup>5</sup>

In the XVIII Century, in the city there was a long tradition of “spontaneous servants” who humbly assisted the sick of the Major Hospital during some days of the week, side by side with the ordinary staff, for instance the two lay members of “Penance” linked with the Jesuits of S. Fedele and Brera, or the Pious Assembly of St. John of God, at the Church of St.Mary Fulcorina. Their charitable task consisted in settling the beds of the sick”.<sup>6</sup>

Fr. Felice De Vecchi, first assistant priest, then parish priest of St. Alexander’s Parish, spent time confessing people, visiting the sick of the parish and of the hospital (the “Ca’ Granda”), doing spiritual direction and preaching.

His first biographer, in fact, wrote: “Don Felice, after extending his charity not only to the sick of his Parish and of the City, but also to those of the Major Hospital where he was frequently either hearing confession or help them spiritually or temporally, realized that this very vast range of

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<sup>1</sup> CF. CASIRAGHI G., *Pia Unione di Carità e di Beneficenza: un esempio di volontariato laico nella Milano del primo Ottocento*, in “*Barnabiti Studi*”, Review of the Clerics Regular of St. Paul, Rome , No. 7, 1990.

<sup>2</sup> De Vecchi P. Felice was born in Milan in 1745. In 1761 he entered the Congregation of the Barnabites. In 1768 he was ordained a priest. He became parish priest of St. Alexander and organized together with his brother Cajetan, in 1801, the “Pious Union for the Hospital”. In Milan he was the coordinator of Christian resistance against depravity and lay naturalism. He was a great and much sought after preacher, known almost in all of Italy for his activity as an Apostolic Missioner. He helped Magdalene of Canossa in the decisive moment when she was leaving her family. He died in Milan in 1812.

<sup>3</sup> Countess Caroline Durini - Trotti: was born in 1762 of Ludovic Trotti Bentivoglio and Costance Castelbarco Visconti. She had two sisters: Paola and Teresa and a brother, Lawrence. In 1782 she married Count Charles Francis Durini. In 1800, in one of her trips to Verona, she met the Marchioness Magdalene of Canossa and became her friend. Their friendship will last for the whole of her life. She died in Milan in 1840.

<sup>4</sup> Marchioness Teresa Trotti Arconati, Caroline’s sister, was born in 1765. She was the last of the three daughters of Mrs. Castelbarco. She married, in 1784, Marquis Charles Arconati. She died in 1805.

<sup>5</sup> Palazzi Riva Don Charles: a very pious priest , a librarian and theologian of the “Christian Friendship”. He compiled the Catechism to instruct the sick. (Cf. MICHELINI V., *Le Amicizie Cristiane*, Milan 1977, pp. 55-57.

<sup>6</sup> VACCARO L., *Maddalena di Canossa e le “Dame del biscottino”*, in A.A. VV., *Maddalena di Canossa e la Chiesa di Milano*, NED 1990, pp. 46-47.

human miseries could be a new field of apostolate for his very ardent zeal and that of the many other persons whom he was directing on the way of virtue through the practice of the greatest works of Christian charity”.<sup>7</sup>

“In 1794, during the Spiritual Exercises that Fr. Felice De Vecchi held in the Milanese parish of St. Mary of the Door, among his audience, there were Marchioness Teresa Arconati Visconti, born Trotti Bentivoglio and the Canoness Therese Chabons<sup>8</sup> of the Order of Malta, who was educated by the Salesians of Grenoble and exiled to Italy by the revolutionary France. The good ladies, whose spiritual director was Fr. De Vecchi, met with him and planned to set up a Pious Union which might extend the charity of the parish to the public hospital”.<sup>9</sup>

Fr. Felice De Vecchi, looking into the depth of the soul of his spiritual daughters, Therese Trotti Arconati and Therese Gallien de Chabons, understood that they were endowed with traits and ideals similar to his. He thought that they could work together for the good of many souls, much more because the two friends had a certain bent towards assistance to the sick.

Such an ideal was generated by the news that Countess C. Durini brought back from a trip to Verona in autumn 1800. During this journey, Caroline met Magdalene of Canossa and came to know how much good the Priests and Lay People of the Fraternity were doing among the sick in the Hospital of Mercy. Magdalene, too, was a member of this Association.

When Caroline Durini and Magdalene of Canossa met, they started off a deep friendship which lasted up to the year 1835, when Magdalene died.

C. Durini’s sister, Teresa, as soon as she came to know about the activity carried out by the Veronese Fraternity, wished to do something similar also in Milan.

In fact, we read in Fr. Felice De Vecchi’s biography: “ While he (Fr. De Vecchi) was reflecting on how to respond to the needs, some, who had returned from Verona, informed his spiritual daughter, Marchioness Arconati, that in that city (Verona) there was a Union of pious persons, who were destined in a special way to offer spiritual and temporal help to the poor sick in the Hospital. Teresa felt in her heart a very deep desire to promote such a beneficial work in her country as well, and tried all means to succeed. However, since she usually let herself be fully guided by her Director’s advice in everything, she thought of consulting him first. Don Felice was very happy, because grace had inspired her the holy plan he was thinking about for so long... In the end, since his impulse was from heaven, the Servant of God not only approved that plan, which, he knew clearly, was according to God’s will, but also wished to take up the burden of directing the work, of which he was the main author”.<sup>10</sup>

First of all, Fr. De Vecchi asked for the Archbishop Philip Visconti<sup>11</sup>’s permission. Most probably it was January 1801, because Magdalene’s letter dated 29 January of that year, mentions that the Archbishop had asked for the Rules of the Sacred Fraternity.

“The Trotti sisters involved in the project not only the followers of Fr. De Vecchi, but also the Milanese Christian Friendship<sup>12</sup>, headed by Don Charles Riva Palazzi, who not only welcomed and supported the proposal, but also contributed directly to draft the rules of the new association,

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<sup>7</sup> VALDANI L., *Vita del R. Padre Don Felice De Vecchi Chierico Regolare di S. Paolo e Parroco di Sant’Alessandro*, Milan 1821, p. 115.

<sup>8</sup> Gallien de Chabons Therese: was born in Grenoble in 1758. She was educated by the Sisters of the Visitation. She became Canoness of the Order of Malta, a choice which allowed her to live as a religious without any institutional bonds. The revolutionary events compelled her to take shelter in Italy and to live in poverty.

<sup>9</sup> MICHELINIV., *Le Amicizie Cristiane. Testimonianze storiche di rinascita cattolica*, Milan 1977, p. 102.

<sup>10</sup> VALDANI L., *Vita...o.c.* pp. 116-117.

<sup>11</sup> Msgr. Philip Visconti: was born in Massino, in the diocese of Novara in 1721. He was named Titular of the Metropolitan See of Milan in 1783 by the Emperor Joseph II. Pope Pius VI’s acknowledgment, however, came about only in July 1784. Compelled to participate in the Congress of Lyons, he died there in December 1801.

<sup>12</sup> The “Amicizie Cristiane” were a movement of catholic renewal. They began secretly, then with the change of the historical situation, they became public witnessess as a leaven for the general renewal. The movement was born in Turin through Fr. Diessbach and spread rapidly in various European cities. The “Amicizie Cristiane” spread also in Milan and had a great impact through the action of outstanding personalities - priests and lay people. (Cf. MICHELINI V., *Le Amicizie ...o.c.* pp. 7-9).

which began its activity on 29 September 1801 in the Church of St. Alexander. Thus the Milanese initiative, which was the outcome of a reflection on the Veronese experience, focalized better the objectives and the operational methods to be followed in the hospital. Magdalene of Canossa, realizing at once the new perspective, wrote to her friend Caroline: “ *I am very pleased with your idea regarding the method followed by your Sodality in the Hospital. I find it more useful than ours which, with regard to us women, consists in nothing else but feeding the sick, as you have seen* ”.<sup>13</sup>

As a matter of fact, on 29 September 1801, the Marchioness Trotti Arconati, with a conspicuous group of noble ladies, her friends, began officially the Pious Union in the internal chapel of St. Alexander. The simple religious ceremony was described in Fr. De Vecchi’s biography as follows: “ Thus, having obtained permission from the Government Authority and from the Right Reverend Archbishop Philip Visconti, of great and grateful memory, and, after agreeing with the Director, the administrators and the Superintendents of the well-established Hospital, so that all this could proceed well, they gathered a good number of most outstanding Ladies in town, so that they might take part in the charitable work. On common consent, the same Marchioness Arconati who had zealously promoted the Union was established as administrator, cashier and in charge of all extraordinary needs. All these fervent Ladies met for the first time in the Oratory of St. Alexander on 29 September 1801. After an eloquent speech given by Don Felice, their Director, whose intent was to urge them to start the work with zeal, taking care especially of souls, each Lady sorted out the name of the ward she was supposed to take care of and vied with one another zealously to consecrate themselves to this noble enterprise. In such a manner, they laid down the foundations of the Pious Union for Charity and Welfare”.<sup>14</sup>

Soon, however, this Pious Union extended also to the men the assistance the noble ladies were providing to the women in hospital; thus, only four months later, at the beginning of February 1802, also the male section was born with the same objectives and ideals as that of the female section”.<sup>15</sup>

All the persons enrolled in this Pious Union met once a month, always in St. Alexander’s, to report on the work carried out and to listen to a short reflection of their Director, Fr. Felice, who aimed at fostering their awareness of the main spiritual objective of their charitable commitment.

In fact, in the biography of Marchioness Arconati we read that the main objective of the Pious Union for Charity and Welfare “is to care for the spiritual well-being of the sick, by comforting them with the right knowledge of Religion, encouraging them to be patient; by instructing the ignorant on faith and the indispensable duties of their state; by preparing those who need it to make good a general confession or extraordinary confession; finally, by helping the dying to dispose themselves to die a Christian death. Their corporal services and other helps were secondary for the Pious Union, and each noble lady carried them out according to their zeal and physical strength.”.<sup>16</sup>

The scale of values to be followed in assisting the sick was presented in a pamphlet for the visitor. It dealt with the main truths contained in the Act of Faith, Hope and Charity and in the “Our Father”. It was a manuscript entitled “ Instruction to the sick”, drafted by Don Charles Riva Palazzi who, according to the “ Raggiugli del bene fatto (Reports on the good accomplished), ”<sup>17</sup> was one of the usual confessors called in to assist the sick .

The running of the Pious Union is described in the biographies of Fr. De Vecchi and of the Marquis Arconati as follows: “ This is the fixed time-table: each noble Lady should visit the

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<sup>13</sup> M.d.C., to C. Durini, 14 April 1801, Ep. I, edited by E. Dossi, Pisani, Isola del Liri 1976, p. 44.

<sup>14</sup> VALDANI L., *Vita* (P. De Vecchi)... o.c. p. 118.

<sup>15</sup> CASIRAGHI G., *Pia Unione*...o.c., pp. 147-148.

<sup>16</sup> VALDANI L., *Vita della virtuosa matrona milanese Teresa Trotti Bentivoglio Arconati dedicata al suo incomparabile marito il Signor Carlo Arconati Visconti*, Milano 1809, p. 126 (cf. also VALDANI L., *Vita* (P. De Vecchi)..., p. 119).

<sup>17</sup> The “Istruzione” is a manuscript in the Trivulziana Library, Archives Malvezzi, cat. 4. II/3; the “Raggiugli” kept in the St. Alexander’s Archives are four and are regarding the activity carried out from August 1807 to early 1812.

Hospital at least once a week, choosing the day and time more suitable to her; she should fill a small basket with biscuits, rosaries, Crucifixes, small books of devotion, small catechism books. A big container, kept in a small room and well provided with the necessary items by the Superintendent, was at the disposal of the Pious Union. With this small basket, she went to help the sick in that portion of ward assigned to her. This was a way of introducing herself with good manners to the sick ladies; the objects for devotion were distributed according to the needs of each one.

In this general visit the Ladies used to find out the various spiritual urgent needs of the sick. Those who were available, returned to the Hospital on other days of the week and spent time only with the patients mostly in need of help, of instruction or of conversion and sacramental penance. Those who were not available informed the Superintendent who would see to it herself or with others's help. Through this charitable assistance, many sick changed for the better, came to know the unhappy state of their soul, felt sorry and availed themselves of a general Confession that put their conscience right.”<sup>18</sup>

The noble “ladies of the biscuit” understood that the efficacy of their presence depended on the follow up of those who, discharged by the hospital, were trying to insert themselves back into society.

“ The objective of the Pious Union is to offer to the girls a solid Christian formation whose main ingredients are the teaching of doctrine and acquisition of skills useful for a “family”, so that they may become good mothers and be able to earn their living honestly.”<sup>19</sup>

In the “biography” of Fr. De Vecchi, we read: “In fact, Don Felix realized that many women and girls, who after an immoral life had sincerely converted themselves, having no means of sustenance, when leaving the hospital turned easily back to the road of evil. Therefore, he thought of a way which might prevent them from falling into this evil again”.<sup>20</sup>

The Milanese friends, especially the two sisters Trotti, Caroline and Teresa, wished to associate also the Marchioness Magdalene of Canossa with their apostolic field, but they had to take into account her specific vocation which called her to work first of all in Verona.

The beneficial journey of the Pious Union had a break and was shaken for a while when Marchioness Teresa Trotti Arconati, not yet forty years of age, died in March 1805. She had been the Foundress and the untiring animator of the Pious Association. The impact was greatly felt especially by Caroline who, then, replaced her sister in directing the work. She continued guiding the Pious work according to the spirit of her sister, thus preventing any crisis and the slowing down of the activity.

The Milanese friends insisted again that Magdalene go to Milan, but their request was put off. Magdalene went to Milan with her daughters only in July 1816.

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<sup>18</sup> VALDANI L., *Vita* (P. De Vecchi)... o.c. pp. 119-120.

<sup>19</sup> VACCARO L., *Maddalena*,... o.c. pp. 51-52.

<sup>20</sup> VALDANI L., *Vita* (P. De Vecchi) ... o.c., pp. 121-122.

## CHAPTER 4

### MAGDALENE OF CANOSSA AND THE SICK BEFORE THE FOUNDING OF THE INSTITUTE

#### Her “flair for the sick”

Visiting and assisting the sick in hospital is the 3rd “Branch of Charity” of the main and perennial works willed by Magdalene for her Institute.

The *Rule* approved by the Church in 1828 runs as follows:

*“The Sisters will visit the sick women in hospital in order to instruct, comfort and assist them as if they were really serving the Person of Jesus Christ Himself.”*<sup>1</sup>

In this special ministry of charity, Magdalene’s inborn, natural flair is expressed and concretized.

Every person has inborn potentials. Being ingrained in one’s personal make up, they give rise to desires and abilities which call for full growth. They are the base, and grace builds on them, moving them towards full development.

The Lord, while leading Magdalene through inner lights and the voice of obedience, moved her also in this manner to show her the charismatic mission she was called to accomplish.

The voice of the Spirit spoke to her through experiences of inner repugnance and attractions, restlessness and peace, bitterness and joy, and led her to the completion of the work Divine Will was asking of her.

Magdalene rightly called all this, “her genius”.

At the beginning of her *Memoirs* she wrote:

*“ I also had a natural inclination towards assisting the sick, but it was something natural to me ”.*<sup>2</sup>

And again:

*“However I always felt the usual aversion for the cloister but greatly inclined towards hospital work...”*<sup>3</sup>

#### First training: serene and careful assistance to the sick in her family

After experiencing the cloister twice, Magdalene understood clearly that in the Carmel “she would become holy, but would neither prevent sins, nor help the salvation of souls”.<sup>4</sup> Hence forward, certain that God did not want her to be in a cloister, she returned to her family and, under the spiritual direction of Don Luigi Libera<sup>5</sup> (1792-1800), she cultivated in her heart that “genius” for the works of mercy. It was an efficacious “training” for the work the Lord had in store for her.

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<sup>1</sup> M.d.C., U. R. p. 51.

<sup>2</sup> M.d.C., *Memoirs*, p. 35, No. 26

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39, No. 36.

<sup>4</sup> M.d.C., *Memoirs*, p. 28, No. 8.

<sup>5</sup> Don Luigi Libera (1737-1800): was ordained priest in Verona in 1760. He was a confessor that was esteemed and much sought after.. Magdalene of Canossa met him in the monastery of the Teresas in Verona where he was ordinary confessor for three years: 1790-1793. He became her spiritual director and guide from 1791 to 20 January 1800.

Her family, therefore, became Magdalene's field of action where she put at the service of herself, but above all, of others, her human and spiritual potentials.

Regarding that stretch of time, she wrote in the *Memoirs*:

*"Meanwhile, during one of those first years, while attending Holy Mass, as the priest read some Scripture texts taken from the Book of Tobit, I felt a strong inner impulse to dedicate myself to works of Charity and I resolved to do so. It was not because I already had a clear idea of what this Work would be, but I was thinking of the good I would be able to perform at that time. So I did, for I also had a natural inclination towards the sick whom God never failed to put along my way throughout the period I stayed with my family".*<sup>6</sup>

In fact, she assisted lovingly in their illness her two younger sisters Rose<sup>7</sup> and Eleanor<sup>8</sup> and her two paternal grand-uncles, Francis<sup>9</sup> and Francis Borgia<sup>10</sup>, both brothers of her grand-father Marquis Charles Canossa.<sup>11</sup> In November 1792 there were two sick persons in Canossa Palace: the old grand-uncle Francis and her young sister Rosa; Magdalene cared for them with affection; she only complained of not being able to devote herself to prayer as she liked.

Her spiritual director, Don Libera, wrote to her to calm her down. Knowing about her genius for the sick, he took the chance to remind her of the faith vision which has to be present in this work of mercy, a vision that she inserted as a basis in her *Rules for the Hospital*:

*"Courage, my daughter ...If at present you cannot dedicate yourself to prayer as much as your heart desires, remember to do everything in a spirit of love... God is love, says the beloved disciple, and he who lives and works in love and with love, lives in God and God in him. To assist the sick, to console them and lighten their burdens is a work of charity. Even in this work, let us try to do it more out of love for God than out of natural affection: we mean to assist Jesus Christ, because he did not disdain to accept what is done to the poor sick as done to himself, when it is done out of love for him".*<sup>12</sup>

Magdalene assisted lovingly her old grand-uncle, Marquis Francis Canossa, during his last, long and final illness. She was her longed-for and irreplaceable nurse. She took care not only of his body, but also of his spirit and provided him with all the religious comforts which the sick uncle received with gratitude.

Don Libera, participating in his daughter's sorrow for the death of her grand-uncle Francis, wrote to her on 23 December 1793:

*"I think it is my duty to write a few lines to you on this occasion (death of grand-uncle Francesco)...My daughter, how many well-founded and sure reasons to feel consolation, comfort and hope the Lord gives to you, having taken him and placed him in the beautiful place of peace! His was always an exemplary Christian life. His long and painful illness, the frequent reception of the Sacraments, the assistance by so many Religious, the reception of all the Last Rites of the Church, what more can one desire, my daughter, to hope more surely that he is saved..."*<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> M.d.C., *Memoirs*, edited by E. Pollonara, p. 25

<sup>7</sup> Marchioness Rose Canossa (1777-1851) Magdalene's sister. On 30 January 1798 she married Count Orti Manara.

<sup>8</sup> Marchioness Eleanor Canossa (1779-1857) was the youngest sister of Magdalene. She married Count Frederick Serego on 20 January 1799.

<sup>9</sup> Marquis Francis Canossa (1718-1793), grand-uncle of Magdalene and brother of her grand-father Charles Canossa.

<sup>10</sup> Canossa Marquis Francesco Borgia (1722-1804) brother of Marquis Carlo (Magdalene's grand-father).

<sup>11</sup> Marquis Charles Canossa (- + 1755) father of Ottavio, and therefore Magdalene's grand-father

<sup>12</sup> LIBERA L., to M.d.C., 19 November 1792, p. 29-30.

<sup>13</sup> LIBERA L., to M.d.C., 23 December 1793, p. 66.

Also the physical and spiritual health of her young sister Rose, who was entrusted to her care, worried Magdalene: while trying to heal her body with tender, loving care, Magdalene looked also with love and trepidation into the depth of her spirit and understood that she needed support to keep away from moral dangers.

Magdalene thought of getting a confessor for her, always in agreement with her director, who wrote to her:

*“My dear daughter, I do not want you to be anxious. Try to give your young sister all the attention possible and be certain that God does not require more prudence than one can have and that when a young lady starts growing, the best means to help her is a good Confessor who will help her to grow in confidence and certainly keep her far away from bad company...”*<sup>14</sup>

Magdalene, full of concern, was ever ready to help others through self-giving, whether they asked for it or not, and watched over the future of her sister with the heart of a mother.

She experienced also exile which caused her painful separations and made heavier the burden of her responsibility with regard to her sisters Rose and Eleanor.

It was the year 1796. Napoleon’s invasion of Italy and the revolutionary havoc brought about in the peninsula involved also Verona and the Canossa family.

Magdalene and her sisters were compelled to flee to Venice and remained there from the end of May 1796 up to October 1797.

The discomforts and dangers of exile were coupled with her worry about Eleanor’s illness.

Once again the Lord asked her to work silently for the sick members of her family.

Her sister Eleanor, after Magdalene’s death, shared the following significant experience:

*“In 1796 I had the good fortune of rejoining my family, and I followed Magdalene to Venice to complete my education. In that capital I discovered in Magdalene the kind mother who thought of everything and everybody... She realized that I was weak in health and she tried her very best to provide me with all comforts at the various places we lodged while away from home. The best room was always for me. I shall never forget her care, her sleepless nights, her kindness. The sweetness and patience she showed to me during my illness will never fade from my memory and from my heart. It was at this time that I had the opportunity to discover in her the sentiments of love, piety, and true charity which distinguished her in life as well as in death.”*<sup>15</sup>

It is touching to see the young Marchioness, forgetting her needs and involving herself in bringing serenity and comfort to all, especially to her two sisters whom she loved dearly and considered her own daughters.

It was the year 1800. Her family still needed her assiduous and constant assistance, in particular the old grand-uncle Francis Borgia. Magdalene was the only woman at home after Eleanor’s marriage, which took place on 20 January 1799.

The eighty-year old grand-uncle Borgia, unmarried, was full of whims and sadness; his grand-niece, even though taken up with other commitments inside and outside the family, took care of him and was able, by her gentle and delicate concern, to soothe his death which occurred on 15 February 1804.

During his last year of life, the sick man, who was very fond of Magdalene, wanted her to be close to him in his suffering. Magdalene herself mentioned this when writing to her Milanese friend, Caroline Durini:

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<sup>14</sup> LIBERA L., to M.d.C., no date (December 1792), p. 34.

<sup>15</sup> News of Countess Eleanor Canossa, widow Serego in Piccari T., *Sola con Dio solo*, Ancora 1966, pp. 854-855.

*“My greatest reason for being silent, or better, the only reason is the unceasing disease of uncle Borgia, who likes me to be in his company.”*<sup>16</sup>

And five months later:

*“...my uncle is still very sick and I have no free time”.*<sup>17</sup>

Providence offered her for many years the opportunity of being close to the sick in her home so as to prepare her for her future task of consoling the afflicted!

Magdalene loved and served her family members as well as the poor whom she met in their home and along the wards of the Hospital. How many times she stopped to soothe their misery! Passing by, she brought comfort to their spirit and help to their body.

### **Magdalene of Canossa, a liaison between the Fraternity of Verona and the Pious Union of the Ladies of Milan and Venice**

The Hospital and the sick in hospital had a special place in Magdalene's heart. Recalling those years she wrote:

*“Called by God's goodness to assist the poor...I went for hospital visitation with the Pious Union of the Hospital Ladies”.*<sup>18</sup>

Magdalene, as we have mentioned, was a member of the “Sacred Fraternity of Hospital Priests and Laity” and co-operated with Don Peter Leonardi in the drafting of the General Plan of the Pious Union.

In autumn 1800, she met Countess Caroline Trotti Durini who stopped at Verona during one of her frequent journeys to the various Italian cities. The two noble Ladies had the same ideals; both were devoting themselves to the works of charity; they loved, assisted and comforted the sick.

This encounter marked the beginning of a deep, lasting friendship between the two of them. Furthermore, at that time Magdalene was affected by scarlet fever. Thus, C. Durini had the opportunity to visit Magdalene at home and to converse with her at length and their relationship grew stronger in a very short time. So much so that in November 1800, Magdalene expressed herself as follows in her first letter to her Milanese friend:

*“My dear Caroline, I do not know what to add to our agreement. Whether you will be in Verona or at the Pole, my affection and friendship for you will never change.”*<sup>19</sup>

Right from this first encounter the two noble ladies began an exchange of letters which are the richest source to show Magdalene's commitment to assist the sick, its objectives and developments; their letters show how the Veronese group was working in line with the same ideals as those of the Pious Union operating at the Major Hospital in Milan.

“Magdalene's letters to C. Durini, - wrote Luciano Vaccaro- offer an exact record, though indirect, of what was happening in Milan: the project, the beginning, difficulties, persons involved, the range of activities which characterised the Union. Keeping up correspondence was for Magdalene a means to provide advice, suggestions, cautions, appreciation. Though she was

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<sup>16</sup> M.d.C., to C. Durini, 3 July 1803, Ep. I, p. 192.

<sup>17</sup> M.d.C., to C. Durini, 4 December 1803, Ep. I, p. 210.

<sup>18</sup> M.d.C., *Pro-memoria* to Count Mellerio, 25 March 1818, Ep. II/1, p. 103.

<sup>19</sup> M.d.C., to C. Durini, 10 November 1800, Ep. I, p. 8.

treading a different path, she shared deeply in their work, so much so that her Milanese friends dreamt of associating her to their ever growing work”.<sup>20</sup>

Meanwhile, Magdalene had joined the ‘Sacred Fraternity’ and was actively involved in it; her generous contribution in assisting the sick was so great and her work so outstanding that the Religious of the Pious Union thought of proposing her as directress of the Hospital of Mercy.

She wrote to her Milanese friend as follows:

*“Know that the Governess of our Hospital is seriously ill, the Religious would like that, if she will not be about any more, I take up the charge, remaining in my house and putting another one who will reside permanently in the Hospital. She would depend entirely on me. I should supervise everything, in actual fact, be the Governess.”*<sup>21</sup>

In the same letter, to C. Durini who had asked her for the “General Plan of the Fraternity”<sup>22</sup>, because in Milan they were trying to form the “Pious Union of Charity and Welfare”<sup>23</sup>, she replied:

*“My dearest friend, I am sorry not to be able to send you the Rules of our Hospital Religious, because Don Peter, who came to me today, sufficiently restored to health, tells me that he does not want to give them to me as long as they are not completed...”*<sup>23</sup>

On her part, Magdalene, independently of all the Religious of the Fraternity, had already drafted in 1799 her own “Plan”<sup>24</sup> about an institution she intended to initiate to help the girls and the sick; therefore, were she elected Governess of the Hospital of Mercy, it could be a favourable chance to implement her project, but her family commitments made her perplex about the matter.

On 10 March, she wrote again to Caroline Durini:

*“Regarding the Hospital, I think I will not take up such a commitment at present, though you know I would be pleased to do it, due to my bent, my inclination, I would say my vocation for it. I might expose myself to being involved in many commitments and unable to fulfil any of them”*.<sup>25</sup>

Eight days later, she returned on the topic and mentioned that the lay Administration had difficulty regarding her name. Then, she communicated to the friend her decision:

*“...dear friend, concerning the business of the Hospital, I have no hope to assume the task, because, those who wished me to become the Governess were the Religious of the Hospital, but the Temporal Session, that is, the Secular one,<sup>26</sup> did not utter a word about it... As I wrote to you, on one hand I feel sorry, but on the other I am pleased. It is not that I would have difficulty attending to the girls and to the Hospital, because, as you say well, this is our plan,<sup>27</sup> but my difficulty consisted in having to take up this commitment while being tied up with my family...”*

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<sup>20</sup> VACCARO L., *Maddalena di Canossa...* o.c. pp. 52-53.

<sup>21</sup> M.d.C., to C. Durini, 1 March 1801, Ep. I, p. 30.

<sup>22</sup> The General Plan of the Brotherhood was printed for the first time in 1796, was revised various times, and the last draft about all the members was made in 1801.

<sup>23</sup> M.d.C., to C. Durini, 1 March 1801, Ep. 1, p. 28.

<sup>24</sup> It is Plan B6 in M.d.C., Ep. II/2, pp. 1415-1419.

<sup>25</sup> M.d.C., to C. Durini, 10 March 1801, Ep. I, p. 32.

<sup>26</sup> Temporal, that is, Secular Session: the various Veronese hospitals had been centred in the Hospital of Mercy whose administration was entrusted to the so-called Temporal Session, made up of lay people, more or less imbued with the new ideas (cf. Casetta G., o.c., pp. 113.114).

<sup>27</sup> Plan B. 6, in Ep. II/2 pp. 1415-1419.

*If the Lord let things as they are, this is how I would go about the matter so as to carry out things in the best way and obey at the same time. I am told that they hope to find a Governess good in all senses, therefore, I will take the chance to go to the hospital for the usual visits, get acquainted with the newly elected and, if I see that we can get along, little by little try to become friends. We may do so, in such a way that no one will notice it and without endangering anyone. Then, when our friendship is established, try to draw her to our ideas in such a way that she is in the limelight, while we try to carry out sweetly and wisely our Plan".*<sup>28</sup>

In April 1801, when the Countess Rambaldo Ludovica <sup>29</sup> was elected Governess of the Hospital of Mercy, Magdalene was happy. She hoped to build up friendship with her so as to work discreetly and efficaciously together with her.

After meeting her, she described her as follow in her letter to Caroline:

*"At last I had the chance to see, or rather, to speak at length to the new Governess of the Hospital, since she was so kind as to come and visit me. According to my little judgement, I find her very suitable at any rate. She is specially filled with charity and dexterity, able to govern as it should be. Well, I think that the Lord really wanted her in that place..."*<sup>30</sup>

Meanwhile, in June 1801, the General Plan of the Veronese Evangelical Fraternity was re-printed and sent to C. Rosmini, through Magdalene. It was supposed to be a sample for the "Pious Union of Hospital Workers" which Fr. Felix De Vecchi was establishing in Milan with the Marchioness Teresa Trotti Arconati, Caroline Durini's sister.

On 18 June 1801, Magdalene wrote thus to her Milanese friend:

*"I hope that by this time you have received another letter of mine... together with the Rules of the Religious (of the Brotherhood), and the papers submitted, I think, by the Temporal Prior of the Hospital to obtain the Government's permission, after having first received the Bishop's approval".*<sup>31</sup>

A month later she asked:

*"...Don Peter ... would like to know what you think about the Rules of the Hospital Religious, if you are in favour of them. In short, he wants to hear your opinion".*<sup>32</sup>

Finally, after overcoming difficulties and being helped first by some noble Ladies for the female section, and later by some noble Gentlemen for the male section, in September 1801 Fr. Felix De Vecchi began the Pious Union of Welfare, in the Major Hospital of Milan, at the "Ca' Granda". It was similar, in many aspects, to the Veronese Brotherhood.

In the Statute of the Pious Union for Hospital Workers, which Magdalene later on requested from Caroline, we read:

*"The main objective of this Pious Union which was established in 1801 by various Gentlemen and Priests for the men and by various noble Ladies for the women, with the approval and appreciation of the deceased Archbishop Visconti Philip and of the present Capitular Vicar*

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<sup>28</sup> M.d.C., to C. Durini, 18 March 1801, Ep. I, p. 34.

<sup>29</sup> Rambaldo Ludovica was born in Corfù in 1762. Being an orphan of both parents, she was welcomed by her paternal grand-mother, Marchioness Terese Sagramoso of Verona, who had her educated by the Benedictine Sisters. When she was elected Governess of the Hospital of Mercy, she responded to the expectations of the Hospitallers. She served the poor for 32 years, also renouncing rich offers, with exemplary charity unto her death which occurred in 1833.

<sup>30</sup> M.d.C., to C. Durini, 24 June 1801, Ep. I, p. 67.

<sup>31</sup> M.d.C., to C. Durini, 18 June 1801, Ep. I, p. 64.

<sup>32</sup> M.d.C., to C. Durini, 28 July 1801, Ep. I, p. 74.

*General and of the Superintendents of the Hospital, is to care for the spiritual welfare of the sick. They think, like St. Dionitius L'Aeropagita, that the most holy, most meritorious and most divine occupation is that of co-operating with the Divine Mercy to save souls.*

*( Divinorum omnium divinissimum est cooperari in salute animarum ). This is done by suggesting to the sick sentiments of Christian faith, animating them to patience, to trust God in their troubles, by instructing the ignorant about Religion and their duties and above all, encouraging them to make good general confessions or extraordinary confessions, according to their need, and preparing the dying to die in a Christian way. ”.*<sup>33</sup>

On 23 October 1801, Magdalene congratulated C. Durini for the flourishing of the Milanese work:

*“I am pleased about the number of companions who, you say, are enrolled for your hospital. See, my dearest Caroline, it is enough to begin so that the Lord may draw many of them ”.*<sup>34</sup>

Again on 25 December 1801, Magdalene shared with her friend her joy. She added that she wished that a Sodality of male Religious like the Veronese Brotherhood be established in Milan so that they might take care of the men:

*“I cannot express the joy I experienced when I read in your last letter, my dearest Caroline, that the holy Work of the Hospital is so well established. Even though I do not cry so easily, I could not refrain from weeping, feeling consoled that something which gives so much glory to God and goes to the benefit of souls was established in such a short time ... What I wish for, now, for your Country (Milan) is that these ladies may find Religious who can hear confessions and little by little establish a Sodality of Religious like ours (The Fraternity) whose Religious, besides hearing the confessions of women, may also do a charitable service to the men as the Ladies are doing to the women ”.*<sup>35</sup>

In Milan they think that it is not necessary to form a “Sodality of Religious” as in Verona because the Ambrosian Clergy are solicitous in their pastoral care. Besides, this new entity would change the lay character of the group. However, through Countess C. Durini, the Religious of the Veronese Fraternity tried to establish a relationship with Fr. Felix De Vecchi. They wished to collaborate with the whole catholic movement of Milan, which, in turn, was connected with that of Turin and Bergamo. Magdalene letters to her Milanese friend give us the chance to discover the wonderful co-operation going on for the good of the Church:

*“I have an errand which I wish to explain clearly to you so that you do not doubt about the confidentiality I have kept in other meetings. When you wrote to me last winter about the beautiful work of your Hospital, you also told me to keep it a secret, and I did so. Later on, seeing that the matter was public I still kept silence, though not in such a scrupulous manner. When Marquis Casati <sup>36</sup>passed by here and told me so many beautiful things, I related everything to Don Charles (Steeb) and Don Leonardi (Peter). They, being very happy about it, have one wish only, which I did not want to grant them without first asking for your permission and advice. They would like to write to Fr. De Vecchi, who, they think, is the head of the work, to congratulate him and to start a mutual*

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<sup>33</sup> Report of the Pious Union of Charity for the Major Hospital of Milan, ms. A,3, XIII, A.C.R. (cf. also Casiraghi G., *Pia Unione...o.c.*, p. 173).

<sup>34</sup> M.d.C., to C. Durini, 20 October 1801, Ep. I, p. 89.

<sup>35</sup> M.d.C., to C. Durini 25 December 1801, Ep. I, pp. 101-102.

<sup>36</sup> Marquis Francis Canossa (1764-1837). He was a man of great commitment and piety. He played important governmental and municipal roles in Milan. He was involved in various charitable works. He became acquainted with the Marchioness Magdalene of Canossa through Msgr. Zoppi and a good protector of the Institute.

*exchange, which they hope may be for the Glory of God as they can have the opportunity of sharing their insights”.*<sup>37</sup>

The positive answer did not delay. Magdalene was ever open to advice and suggestions for the Glory of God and her ardent wish was satisfied.

Collaboration between Verona and Milan was active and efficacious for the whole Napoleonic period.

We do not know how far and how important it was because the work was done in a hidden, silent way with the only aim of giving glory to God and saving souls.

On 21 March 1805, the Marchioness Terese Arconati, only 39 years of age, died a holy death. Her sister Caroline, married to Count Durini, being an hospital Lady, was called in to replace her as directress of the Pious Union of the Major Hospital in Milan.

Even Magdalene felt very much the loss of Caroline's sister. She shared in Caroline's sorrow, consoled her, encouraged her to continue the works of charity, telling her that the Lord, now that her sister Teresa was in heaven, would be closer to her:

*“... my dear friend, the Lord wants you to be totally his. This is the reason, I think, why he has taken away a person so worthy of your affection. I am speaking in all sincerity. For a very long time I do not remember having felt so deeply the loss of anyone as this time, not even of one of my relatives. I imagine the situation you are in, seeing how many bonds, all aiming at the Divine Glory, are broken...*

*Yes, dear Caroline, God will take the place of your sister, for the short time you and I are separated. Your holy works will go on in the same way, because the Lord himself will work more”.*<sup>38</sup>

After initiating the Institute, Magdalene kept on collaborating with the Hospital Ladies of Milan and in 1810 she helped also the Venetian noble Ladies.

She wrote:

*“ Two years after I was living there (Verona- St. Joseph's), I was called to Venice to help with the establishment of a school of charity which the Cavanis<sup>39</sup> brothers, worthy religious, wished to open.*

*Since Canon Pacetti<sup>40</sup> was here, he commanded me to give, at the same time, a helping hand, a thing which I did, to promote a group of noble ladies for the assistance to the sick in these hospitals in their extreme spiritual needs, in imitation of the Pious Union of Charity in Milan. It has pleased the Lord to bring it to fruition, though at present, it is very limited in number.”*<sup>41</sup>

To promote this Pious Union of Noble Ladies assisting the sick in Venice, Magdalene asked her friend C. Durini for the Rules and the methods followed by the Major Hospital in Milan.

In fact, writing to her from Venice on 5 June 1810, she expressed herself as follows:

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<sup>37</sup> M.d.C., to C. Durini, 17 July 1802, Ep. I, pp. 141-142.

<sup>38</sup> M.d.C., to C. Durini, 2 April 1805, Ep. I, p. 248.

<sup>39</sup> Count Anthony Angelo Maria Cavanis (1772-1858), Cavanis Mark Anthony Peter Maria (1774-1853): two eminent priests and educators especially of the poor and needy youth of Venice. In 1804 they opened in Venice the first school of charity for children and adolescents. In 1808 they began the school for girls and to do so they called to Venice for the Marchioness Magdalene of Canossa (Cf. M.d.C. Memoirs edited by Pollonara E., Rusconi 1988, p. 389)

<sup>40</sup> Msgr. Louis Pacific Pacetti (1761-1819): a Jesuit up to the suppression of the Order, an Apostolic Missionary and direct collaborator of Pius VII. He was a famous preacher. In 1804 he was invited to the parish of St. Eufemia in Verona to prepare the people to celebrate the feast of Corpus Domini. In between his two preachings, there occurred the first meeting of Magdalene with him. It was a providential encounter and it gave her life a significant and lasting change. He was, in fact the first director of the Institute and Magdalene's spiritual director up to his death which occurred on 18 December 1819.

<sup>41</sup> M.d.C., to C. Durini, 30 January 1816, Ep., I, p. 435.

*“My dear Caroline, I have to trouble you. Please send me as soon as possible a copy of that Catechism which you use to instruct the sick in the hospital, and if it is possible, a brief description of your work in the hospital, as there are some good ladies here who would like to imitate what is being done in Milan, since they know that the Sovereign is in favour of it. But here, it is carried out on a private level. My dear Caroline, I think that you will be very happy about the fact that both of us can co-operate in this good work at least with these papers.”*<sup>42</sup>

On 10 July, back to Verona, Magdalene wrote:

*“I thank you sincerely for the book regarding the hospital and for the rules of the same. Those Venetian Ladies, wishing to be involved, had a booklet on the matter since a few years ago, yet the way of supporting the work frightens them. They have decided to set up first a fund and then start visiting the sick in hospital. They want to follow your way of doing this... To train themselves, they will begin first to visit the small hospital of the old ladies, then, when the funds are settled, they will go to the bigger hospital... However, do not think that I have finished troubling you about this business. Truly, the Lord seems to wish the same charity for the poor and the sick to be carried out in Venice as it is done in Milan, much more so since the Government approves of it. You have given me the rules for the ladies, now I would like to ask you for those for the gentlemen. Tell me also how the two Unions are connected and how they help each other...”*<sup>43</sup>

On 30 October 1810, she wrote again:

*“My dearest friend, as I know how much you welcome the news of the good carried out in the hospitals, I am sending you the consoling report that the noble Ladies in Venice are ever more interested in the work they have begun in the hospital. Already nine of them are visiting the hospital. They are planning to go soon to the big hospital, which is the prime objective of their charity; therefore, they would like to have a dozen books, like those you have kindly sent to me when I was in Venice”.*<sup>44</sup>

In January 1811, Magdalene asked Countess C. Durini about the book for instructing the sick to receive the Sacraments. We think it is the Catechism entitled “Instructions for the sick”<sup>45</sup> which is attributed to Don Charles Riva Palazzi<sup>46</sup>.

She wrote as follows:

*“I would like you to send me, as soon as possible, in Venice, a copy of the book you use for instructing the sick over there”.*<sup>47</sup>

Magdalene was not satisfied with the booklet about how to instruct the sick, which Caroline Durini had sent her. She tried to get a catechism book for the most seriously sick persons and a short catechism for the dying.

In fact, a noble Lady from Florence, who was engaged in a work similar to that in Milan, had given her some booklets suitable for the spiritual assistance of the seriously ill, especially where there were no priests or well-prepared persons.

She sent them also to her Milanese friends saying:

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<sup>42</sup> M.d.C., to C. Durini, 5 June 1810, Ep. I, p. 341.

<sup>43</sup> M.d.C., to C. Durini, 10 July 1810, Ep. I, pp. 342-343.

<sup>44</sup> M.d.C., to C. Durini, 30 October 1810, Ep., I, p. 350.

<sup>45</sup> Don Charles Riva Palazzi, member of the “Amicizia cristiana”, a Milanese, (cf. MICHELINI VITTORIO, *Le Amicizie Cristiane*, Milan 1977, p. 55-57).

<sup>46</sup> Don Charles Riva Palazzi, *Isatruzioni per gli inermi*, Civic, Historical Archives, Milan, Fondo Malvezzi, 4.

<sup>47</sup> M.d.C., to C. Durini, 11 January 1811, Ep. I, pp. 352-353.

*“ I beg your pardon for sending you, who are so clever in hospital visitation, four booklets which had been given to me by a noble Lady from Florence who is also engaged in a work similar to yours. I enclose also a short Catechism for the very seriously ill, which is used in another hospital. I thought you might need it, too. This is why I am sending it. If you are pleased with it, I would like to inform you that in the Hospital where they use this short Catechism for the dying, also a bigger one is used for those who are not seriously ill. I could send even that... You understand well, my dear, that they use it when the women instruct for lack of priests, whose number is insufficient compared to the number of the sick. In fact, even though a woman may be able to instruct them, surely just one or a few among the many will get instructed. But, since we cannot trust every woman to instruct, many sick women remain without instructions, and if they die without being instructed, how will they be saved? And if they leave the hospital, they will go away as ignorant as when they came in”.*<sup>48</sup>

In the first decade of October 1812, Magdalene, who had already opened the Institute in Venice, went to Padua to meet a young aspirant to religious life. This tireless apostle, having to stop longer because of the flood<sup>49</sup>, did not waste time. Together with the noble ladies of her group and the zealous Lady Priuli Loredana<sup>50</sup>, she started assistance in the hospitals as it was done in Milan and Venice.

She wrote in her *Memoirs*:

*“So I went to Padua...and when I was there, although there was very little to do, I made myself available for services wherever possible, precisely as I intended doing. Since some good persons had started and brought everything to completion,... the Lord established the assistance in that Hospital.”*<sup>51</sup>

Finally, in 1825, Magdalene was concerned again to send the norms of the Hospital of Milan and Venice to Bergamo so as to begin there too the group of the noble Hospital Ladies.

Thus, on 8 January 1825, she wrote to her daughter Giuseppa Terragnoli, Superior in Venice:

*“ I would like a favour from you: kindly ask our good Micheli<sup>52</sup> if she has a copy of the system for visiting the hospitals... I would like you to copy it as detailed as possible and send it to me, since there is a person in town who would like to start a similar work. Thus, you, too, will have a share in the good they will do”.*<sup>53</sup>

The city for which Magdalene asked the system for visiting the hospitals was Bergamo and the person was Count Don Luke Passi.<sup>54</sup>

To the Superior of Bergamo, Rose Dabalà, the Marchioness wrote as follows:

*“Since I am unable to write today, as I should, to Count Luke (Passi) and Don John (Zanetti)<sup>55</sup>... I will write to them soon. Meanwhile, hand the two papers regarding the*

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<sup>48</sup> M.d.C., to C. Durini, 20 December 1811, Ep. I, pp. 360-361.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. M.d.C. to C. Durini, 28 October 1812, Ep. I, p. 372.

<sup>50</sup> Priuli Loredana Tron (1780-1832): daughter of Francis, married Count George Priuli. She was a widow and dedicated the rest of her life to works of charity. She was the Lady who welcomed Magdalene to Venice (Cf. M.d.C., *Memoirs.*, Rusconi, p. 405).

<sup>51</sup> M.d.C., *Memoirs*, edited by Pollonara E., p. 116-117.

<sup>52</sup> Noble Lady Micheli: she was a Noble Lady, Vice-Queen, Princess Augusta Amalia from Baviera, wife of the Prince Eugene Beauharnais (Cf. Ep. I, p. 642).

<sup>53</sup> M.d.C. to G. Terragnoli, 8 January 1825, Ep. III/2, p. 1023.

<sup>54</sup> Don Luke Passi: one of the sons of Count Henry and the noble Lady Catherine Corner. He was born in Bergamo in 1789 and died in Venice in 1866. He was an Apostolic Missionary and founder of the Pious Work and the Religious Institute of St. Dorothea.

<sup>55</sup> Don John Zanetti (1776-1846): was assigned to the Church and District of St. Bernardine in Bergamo. He was an extraordinary spiritual director and preacher. He met Magdalene in 1824 and became her precious counsellor. (Cf. Pollonara E., o.c., p. 414).

*Hospital of Milan<sup>56</sup> and Venice<sup>57</sup> to Don John and beg him to send them back by Sunday afternoon, together with the letter I will send him with the mail of Saturday for Count Luke. Dispatch everything, on my behalf, to the same person. You may read it, if you wish... The reason why the papers should be sent quickly to Count Luke (Passi) is on account of what Calvetti<sup>58</sup> told us about the children who die of hunger..for the sake of charity, it is necessary to establish also the Institute of the Hospital Ladies so as to do something, in time, to meet that need. ..”<sup>59</sup>*

As she mentioned in the above letter addressed to the Superior of Bergamo, Magdalene had sent her a letter addressed to Count Don Luke Passi. It was the covering letter for the Rules about visits to Hospital of the Ladies in Venice and Milan which she had asked for, so as to use them also in Bergamo.<sup>60</sup>

Magdalene of Canossa, however, did not assist only the sick members of her family, or cared for the sick only as a Lady of the Veronese Brotherhood or collaborated with the Hospital Ladies of Milan and Venice. Rather, the sick were among the first beneficiaries of her charity in her projects or Plans of foundation of the Institute of the Daughters of Charity.

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<sup>56</sup> Report of the Pious Union of Charity for the Major Hospital of Milan, ms., A 3, XII, A.C.R.

<sup>57</sup> The way the Ladies carried out their charitable assistance of the sick in the Major Hospital of that city then and how they perform this charitable activity now, in M.d.C., R.s.s, p. 2 pp. 124-127.

<sup>58</sup> Calvetti was a doctor of Bergamo.

<sup>59</sup> M.d.C., to R. Dabalà, January 1825, Ep. III/2, p. 1028.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. M.d.C., to Passi, no date, in R.ss. P 2, pp. 122-123.

PART TWO

PASTORAL CARE  
OF THE SICK  
IN THE PLANS  
OF MAGDALENE

## CHAPTER 5

### THE THIRD MINISTRY OF CHARITY IN THE FIRST THREE PLANS OF THE INSTITUTE

The “Plans of the Institute” are Magdalene’s guidelines for the daughters in their apostolate and, above all, a means by which to inform the ecclesiastic and civil authorities about her Institution.

#### Plan B. 6-6

It is the first document Magdalene wrote and contains the oldest draft of Magdalene’s apostolic project.

Plan B. 6-6<sup>1</sup> mentions the male and female branches as clearly distinct from one another and outlines charitable assistance to the sick, whom Magdalene intended to serve.

Magdalene presented in this Plan her first “idea”, like an architectural model, made up of various rooms, where the various activities of the Religious and of the Ladies should foster education, religious instruction, assistance and provide support in illness and in death.

The male Religious had to live as near as possible to the hospital, live in community and have a Superior elected by them.

*“The male religious, therefore, think of living together, under the same roof and united with the bond of charity, at the dependence of a Superior elected among them. Their house should be as close to the hospital as possible. In this place, since the variety of their tasks demands that they follow any vocation, they will employ themselves in helping their neighbour.”*<sup>2</sup>

Regarding the Religious assisting the sick in illness and death, the Plan runs as follows:

*“Here, it is convenient to distinguish two types: the poor who, because of lack of means on the part of the hospital, cannot be admitted and die without any help, and those who are already warded. The only way to assist the first, which seems possible to the Congregation, is to lend themselves generously to the spiritual and temporal assistance of the hospital ... and to assist gratuitously the second. Thus the hospital could afford to admit many more poor persons with all the savings on the salary of workers. This money could be used for the service of the patients. Our help would be spiritual as far as possible, but also corporal. As for the spiritual side, the Congregation thinks of assisting the patients of the Hospital, day and night, without any pay. They would instruct them, console them in the most charitable way possible, administer to them the most Holy Sacraments, supporting them in their agony and comforting them at their death.”*<sup>3</sup>

About the female branch, we read in the same Plan B. 6-6 that the women, too, should live life in common, under the guidance of a Superior, immediately depending on the Bishop. They should, according to their vocation, engage themselves in one of the following three activities: education, instruction, assistance to the sick. Regarding the latter, it is written in the Plan: ...<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. M.d.C., Plan B. 6-6 in Ep. II/2, pp. 1415-1419.

<sup>2</sup> M.d.C., Plan B. 6-6, Ep. II/2, p. 1416.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 1418.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Ibid., p. 1419.

After describing the vast work of the male and female Religious, Magdalene thought that, for everything to function well, it was necessary to have a complex building made up of various sections:

*“The real desire of the one who writes is that, if it is at all possible, the hospital should be in the middle; on one side very close to it, the men religious could live, and then the boys nearby. In the same way on the other side, the women could live, and then the girls, of course with the necessary and most strict separations.”*<sup>5</sup>

The Plan shows clearly Magdalene’s vocation: to serve the sick in their physical and spiritual needs. Its implementation, however, looked rather problematic because the project was vast and complex.

Magdalene, in presenting the Plan to her spiritual director, Don Libera, expressed to him her desire to join together the hospitals of Verona and to find a suitable place. On 5 July 1799, Don Libera, a wise and prudent man, replied to her as follows:

*“I am of the opinion that, for the time being, we should not talk about the union of the hospitals of Verona in order not to raise a tempest from many persons interested in the matter...*

*Certainly, I do not think it is suitable to build a hospital in the Bazia of St. Zeno<sup>6</sup> - it is in too remote a corner of the city. It would be more suitable to have it in St. Eufemia<sup>7</sup> or in St. Francis of Paola<sup>8</sup> close to (St. Mary) of Victory<sup>9</sup>”.*<sup>10</sup>

The Marchioness thought also of initiating a school for training professional nurses on the pattern of the Rules of the Hospital Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul. Also Don Libera thought that she could draw from them suitable guidelines.<sup>11</sup>

Regarding this, he wrote on 9 September 1799:

*“I think I have a woman very much according to your ideas, when you should establish a house for the education and formation of those girls as hospital workers.”*<sup>12</sup>

The work envisaged by Plan. B. 6-6 seemed to be new and complex and to implement it, it was necessary to listen to the opinion and to get the approval of the ecclesiastical authority.

On her director’s advice, Magdalene asked first for an appointment with Msgr. Gualfardo Ridolfi,<sup>13</sup> Vicar General of the Diocese, and then with the Bishop himself, Msgr. Andrea Avogadro<sup>14</sup>.

For the time being, the Bishop advised her to limit her assistance to the sick and to devote herself especially to the “Schools of Charity”. Magdalene obeyed. In fact, she wrote in her *Memoirs*:

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 1419.

<sup>6</sup> The Abbey of St. Zeno was the most famous convent of Verona. The Church and the monastery were located outside the old walls of the City.

<sup>7</sup> St. Eufemia, a Church located on the right side of the River Adige in Verona.

<sup>8</sup> St. Francis of Paola: Church and monastery located on the left side of the River Adige in Verona.

<sup>9</sup> ST. Mary of the Victory: a church built in 1355 by Cangrande della Scala. It was suppressed in 1866.

<sup>10</sup> LIBERA L. *Letters to M.d.C.*, 5 July 1799, edited by A. Cattari, 1982 p. 163-167

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>12</sup> LIBERA L., to M.d.C., 9 September 1799, Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>13</sup> Msgr. Ridolfi Guastaldo (1745-1818): He was born in Verona of a noble Count family. He entered the ecclesiastic life. He was Vicar General in the area occupied by the French in Verona during Napoleon’s rule. In 1807 he was consecrated Bishop of Rimini, in Milan..

<sup>14</sup> Msgr. Avogadro John Andrew: Cf. herewith Ch. 2, Note 17.

*“However, I visited the sick in the hospital as often as I could, as one of the lady hospitalers, but without worrying how all this would end...”*<sup>15</sup>

Magdalene, therefore, refrained, for the time being, from organizing the hospitals according to her plans. She only carried out her personal duties as a Lady of charity also because her family commitments took up much of her time.

However, she continued to be concerned about the poor sick women, as some letters she addressed to her friend Carolina Durini at that time tell us.

In her letter dated 4 October 1801, she communicated to her, briefly, the project she wished to begin under the guidance of Fr. Domenico Bellavite.<sup>16</sup> It was about educating poor girls and visiting and assisting the sick.

She then mentioned the proposal she had made to Fr. Dominic Bellavite:

*“... I offered to join him (Fr. Bellavite) ..when I am sure that this is the will of God.. Note that he has some ladies who are widows and are quite determined to join him. We are thinking of.. adding to the education of these girls the visits to the sick”*.<sup>17</sup>

Her attempt to join Fr. Bellavite was not accomplished, but Magdalene was still longing to implement her plan (Plan B.6-6) which included also assistance to the sick..

On 4 April 1802, she wrote to C. Durini as follows:

*“A third teacher has been recommended to me...To be fully open with you, I am thinking that one of the two could come with me to the hospital and in this way we could begin the realization of the old plan (Plan B6-6)”*.<sup>18</sup>

Once again Magdalene had to drop her project. The hour of God had not yet come. She had to wait for the 8 May 1808 to come, before she could initiate officially her work.

### **Plan of the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity for the town N.N. (Plan B. 7-7).**

Magdalene of Canossa entered the monastery of Sts. Joseph and Fidentius, first house of the Institute, on 8 May 1808. Her first activity was the education of the abandoned girls she had already gathered earlier on and the school of charity for the girls of St. Zeno’s district. Yet, she did not forget the many suffering people waiting for her comfort and help. In the draft of the Plans of her future work, she included the visits to the hospitals as a special field of action of her apostolate and of that of her daughters.

The draft of Plan B. 7-7, “Plan of the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity”, though it is undated, belongs to the year 1808. Here, Magdalene did not mention any longer the male branch and, furthermore, she was solicited by the new director of the incipient Institute, Msgr. Pacetti,<sup>19</sup> to draw up the Regulations for the institution she was planning.

The document contains “in a nutshell” the spirit of the Institute and mentions both the religious and the charitable components of the activities of the Institute.

After mentioning the need of opening schools and teaching Christian doctrine, Plan B. 7-7 deals with the situation of the sick:

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<sup>15</sup> M.d.C., *Memoirs*, p. 46.

<sup>16</sup> Bellavite Fr. Dominic (1753-1821). He was born in Verona. He was ordained priest by Msgr. Morosini and in 1784, he asked to become a Filippino priest in Mantua. When the Congregation was suppressed he withdrew to private life. He devoted himself to youth.

<sup>17</sup> M.d.C., to C. Durini, 4 October 1801, Ep. I, p. 84.

<sup>18</sup> M.d.C., to C. Durini, 4 April 1802, Ep. I, p. 124.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Ch. 4, note No. 40.

*“These pious persons, besides, saw that the sick in the city and in the hospitals are neglected. Thus they wish to form a Congregation of Charity to meet these spiritual needs. In order to succeed in this, they propose to live in the same house, under the direction of a superior chosen from among them, and to observe a rule of life approved by their Ecclesiastical Superiors . They also propose to observe celibacy and to serve their neighbours.”*<sup>20</sup>

Then, the various activities are examined. Regarding the sick, the document runs as follows:

*“The person congregated who are not suitable for the schools will go to serve the sick in the hospital. Some will make the beds and lend other corporal services and the others will offer all the spiritual help they are capable of. The same is done for the sick in the city. To this end the Sisters of the Congregation will ask the parish priest to supply them with the list of the sick in each parish.”*<sup>21</sup>

The saintly Foundress, certain that the Lord would increase the number of her daughters, wished that the visits to the sick, be carried out in towns as well as in the country-side:

*“If the Lord will deign to multiply the number and the financial possibilities of the sisters gathered together, these will assist the sick both in the hospital and in the city, day and night. They will also lend the same service in schools and to the sick also in the countryside gratuitously”.*<sup>22</sup>

Plan B. 7-7 is the only document which envisages home assistance to the sick.

Being at the beginning of her institution, in this Plan Magdalene considered “the charitable activity the Institute could carry out in the future, while all the following Plans bear witness to what was already done in practice”.<sup>23</sup>

However, the main reason why Magdalene would no longer deal with the visiting of the sick at home in her writings stemmed from an expressed wish of the Holy Father, Pius VII, who had been questioned on the matter by Msgr. Pacetti<sup>24</sup>.

In fact, she expressed herself as follows in a “detailed report about the beginning of the Institute” addressed to Carolina Durini:

*“You know how, having dealt with Msgr. Pacetti about the Plan of the Institute, Msgr. enquired about the will of the Holy Father. The latter agreed on the matter as a whole, but he was not convinced about some practice (visits to the home), which the Holy Father did not consider suitable for Italy. Therefore, as it was our duty, we excluded all that his enlightened mind did not want...”*<sup>25</sup>

On 9 August 1812, soon after she opened the House in Venice, she wrote:

*“Be it known that these sisters will not assist sick women in their homes, but they will carry out... visits and assistance as needed in the hospitals, helping in these especially with instruction...”*<sup>26</sup>

Also Msgr. Pacetti, writing to Magdalene who was drafting the Rule, reminded her of the wish of the Pope:

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<sup>20</sup> M.d.C., Plan of the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity for the town N.N., Ep. II/2, p. 1420.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., pp. 1420-21.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 1421.

<sup>23</sup> Giacom M., *Magdalene of Canossa, her charitable and educational apostolate*, Isola del Liri 1974, p. 181.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Ch. 4, Note No. 40.

<sup>25</sup> M.d.C., to C. Durini, 30 January 1816, Ep. I, p. 434.

<sup>26</sup> M.d.C., to C. Durini, 9 August 1812, Ep. I, pp. 367-368.

*“I spoke (to the Pope Pius VII) about this Work of Charity. How happy he was! He asked me if some practices which are not useful in Italy had been taken away and I assured him that we had followed what His holiness had told me the other time. He was pleased to hear it, and he approved the Institute and blessed it, promising me again that, at a suitable time, I would receive His written approval”.*<sup>27</sup>

Magdalene naturally obeyed and did not mention any longer in the Plans and in the *Rule* the service to the sick in town. However, she continued to think about the assistance in the hospitals which became one of the three main branches of her Institute, together with education and instruction of poor girls.<sup>28</sup>

### **General Plan of the Sisters of Charity Servants of the Poor which was established in Venice in the year 1812: the first day of August, under the protection of Mary Most Holy and Sorrowful. Plan B. 8-8**

The title of Plan B. 8-8 bears a date: 1 August 1812. Most probably it is the compilation date of the document. It coincides with the opening day of the first House in Venice.

In fact, on 1 August 1812, Magdalene of Canossa moved from the Cavanis<sup>29</sup> Hospice to a small rented house in the parish of the Tolentini in Campo S. Andrea in Holy Cross district, with two companions: Elizabeth Mezzaroli and Frances Mary Ghezzi.

Thus, on 9 August 1812, she communicated the event to her friend C. Durini as follows:

*“... I am in a private house rented for the purpose...where I am for eight days now, with two other companions...”*<sup>30</sup>

This General Plan is a real plan which, with the autographed Plan B. 6-6 and the “Plan of the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity for the Town N.N.” B. 7-7, just examined, is specially important and indicates how Magdalene’s thought and ideal were gradually becoming clearer and moving towards practical implementation.

Plan B. 8-8, as a whole, describes the specific activities of the Institute of the Daughters of Charity. This document will be basic to all the following Plans.

In writing to C. Durini, it was Magdalene herself who stated that she could establish fully the Institute only in Venice, in 1812:

*“The Lord started even this House (Venice) which, being the first where the three important ministries of charity are carried out, is considered the first house in the Institute”.*<sup>31</sup>

Even though she had started founding the Institute in Verona in 1808, Magdalene did not feel herself as a Daughter of Charity there, because, the assistance to the sick in hospital being left out, she felt that her ideal was not fully accomplished.

In her “Detailed Report about the beginning of the Institute” Magdalene wrote:

*“In this Monastery (of Sts. Joseph and Fidentius) God began the institution which, for various circumstances, it was not possible to establish or settle totally as the Daughters of Charity do here (in Venice), as there is no visiting of the hospital, although there is the school of charity and assistance to the parochial doctrine...”*<sup>32</sup>

The Branch of the visits to the hospitals began in Verona only in 1826. In fact, on 26 January 1826, Magdalene wrote to E. Bernardi, her daughter, as follows:

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<sup>27</sup> Pacetti Msgr. L.P. to M.d.C., no date, ms A 2, XXXI, A.C.R. (Cf. Piccari T., o.c., pp. 263-264).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. GIACON M., o.c. p. 155.

<sup>29</sup> Cavanis, cf. herewith, Ch. 4, Note No. 39.

<sup>30</sup> M.d.C., to C. Durini, 9 August 1812, Ep. I, p. 367.

<sup>31</sup> M.d.C., to C. Durini, 30 January 1816, Ep. I, p. 435.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

*“I inform you this time that next Saturday, God willing, we shall begin,(in the House of Verona) the visiting of the hospital, however, in a very moderate way. Meanwhile, we are gradually putting into action all the Branches of the Institute”.*<sup>33</sup>

It is clear, therefore, that the Foundress thought that she had established her plan fully in 1812, only in Venice.

The General Plan B. 8-8 regarding the sick says:

*“Among the many spiritual needs of the Christian people, they noticed especially the needs of the hospitals. In these, because of the large number of patients, the majority very ignorant, the small number of priests, so much lessened in the past troubled times, it often happens that they have no time for anything else besides administering the most holy Sacraments. In addition they saw another need for the hospitals. Even though this is not fully spiritual, yet it is in itself a work of charity and contributes perfectly to the good of the soul. It is not only to comfort them but also to lend them material assistance like making up their beds, combing their hair and such like”.*<sup>34</sup>

Then, considering in the same document the activities which were strictly apostolic, the Foundress added:

*“Finally they will meet the other need, particularly noticed, of the hospital by visiting the women patients in the hospital, instructing them about the things necessary to know, assisting them to receive the most holy Sacraments and to die a holy death or, if they were to recover, to persevere in the resolutions made in their sickness.”*<sup>35</sup>

Being solicitous for the soul as well as for the body, she wrote:

*“For the corporal assistance to the patients, the Sisters will meet it by lending themselves in the way which their own circumstances and the prudent judgement of the hospital will allow”.*<sup>36</sup>

Magdalene presented the assistance to the sick as a specific activity of the Institute also in the reports she sent to the Civil Authorities to obtain their approval.

To the Governor of Venice, Count Goess, Magdalene described the goal of her charitable activity as follows:

*“... they will devote themselves to comfort and assist the poor sick in the hospitals...”*<sup>37</sup>

She reiterated this statement in the memorial she presented personally on 9 November to the Emperor Francis I:

*“... the institution... aims also to comfort and assist the poor sick in the hospitals...”*<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> M.d.C., to E. Bernardi, 26 January 1826, Ep. III/2, p. 1308.

<sup>34</sup> M.d.C., General Plan of the Institution of the Sisters of Charity Servants of the Poor, began to be established in Venice on 1 August in 1812, under the protection of Our Lady of Sorrows. Ep. II/2, pp. 1422-1423.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 1424.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> M.d.C., to the Governor of Venice, no date, Ep. II/1, p. 61.

<sup>38</sup> M.d.C., to the Emperor Francis I, 9 November 1815, Ep. II/1, p. 63.

## CHAPTER 6

### MAGDALENE OF CANOSSA AND THE " RULES FOR THE HOSPITAL "

#### Introduction

In the "Rules for the Hospital", Magdalene presents a type of assistance to the sick which differs from mere professional nursing. She outlines a moral, spiritual assistance which is theologically motivated so that is not mere philanthropy. Assistance to the sick is not for Magdalene a social and medical event, but it is a theological event, an act of "divine worship".<sup>1</sup>

Also in the 3rd ministry, Magdalene proposes CHRIST CRUCIFIED as the model, because only by looking at Him will the Daughters of Charity learn how to deal with patience and love with his "suffering members". The saintly Foundress often reminded her daughters that in any apostolic activity, they are called to witness to the MERCIFUL LOVE OF CHRIST.

As we analyze more attentively the various articles of these "Rules", we can discover what spirit should animate the Daughter of Charity when approaching the bed-ridden sick in the hospitals.

#### **The third ministry and charism: "Too much would be lacking in an Institute that enjoys bearing the name of CHARITY"**

It is not enough to be called Daughters of Charity. Such a name demands, according to Magdalene, that the Sisters be really Daughters of Charity.

This concept is well expressed in the Introduction of the Rules for the Hospital which, as in other Rules, focuses on the key-motifs around which this ministry develops:

*"..too much would be lacking in an Institute that enjoys bearing the name of charity and that tries to practise it in many ways, if it lacked this special exercise of visiting and assisting the sick in hospital, since these people are in such a pitiable situation and in great need of comfort."*<sup>2</sup>

Magdalene's great heart desired not only that her daughters be involved in the education and Christian formation of the girls and youth, but also that they experienced "*consolation*" in serving the sick:

*"...having seen to educating, accepting and assisting the children and adolescents through the Schools and Religious Instruction and having well initiated the youth and adults into the holy fear of God and good conduct, it is right and fitting that the Sisters have the consolation to dedicate themselves to comforting the dying and lovingly assist them in preparing for a holy death if that is God's will. They will encourage those who recover and instruct them on how to lead a really Christian life for their own good and that of their children."*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. James 1:27

<sup>2</sup> M.d.C., Rules for the Hospital, U.R., p. 158.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Thus, she outlined the beneficiaries and the objectives of such a “holy exercise” in which everything is repugnant to our human misery”.<sup>4</sup>

Magdalene wisely acknowledged the difficulties connected with this ministry by which persons are met in their greatest need and greatest fragility, and which requested of the Sisters a more “ARDENT CHARITY”. Therefore, in the introduction, she tried to explain the motivation of the Ministry, in a more ample manner than in other Rules, and proposed to the Sisters to meditate not only on a saying of Jesus, but on Jesus Crucified Himself who “suffered on the Cross for them and for the sick”.

*“...The Sisters are reminded of our Divine Saviour’s own words that whatever we do to the least of His Poor is done to Him. The Holy Crucified Lord Himself is placed before the eyes of the Sisters, reminding them that, for them and for the sick they go to visit, He suffered on the Cross with unconquerable patience, meekness, long-suffering and gentleness, while forgetting Himself out of love and sacrificing Himself in order to save us.”<sup>5</sup>*

The Passion event, which the Lord experienced with “unconquerable patience, meekness, suffering and sweetness”, forgetting himself to save us, had to be, at the same time, the inner motivation urging the Sisters to action and to foster their identity in a ministry which would demand of them to practise, on the spot, the “above mentioned virtues” and “sometimes... to give up their own life”.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Rules: at the service of the sick, aiming at their “real good”**

Rules I and II explain how the community defines responsibility and roles, times, means and modalities so as to spot out the needs according to its availability and the different situations where it works.

The following Rules describe modes of behaviour and attitudes to follow when carrying out the Ministry ( along the way, with the sick, with the hospital staff, with the priests), coupled with strong moments of prayer (Rule III, VI, VIII) so as to keep the motivation alive. A central Rule, Rule VII, as in other Rules, deals with the method, that is, on how to deal with the beneficiaries of this ministry.

### **Responsibility and roles: the Ministra of the Hospital and the Sisters engaged in the ministry**

With regard to the persons who must carry out this activity, the Rules point out the moral traits of the Sisters engaged in this ministry, the duties they have to perform, their modalities of action and their relationship with the hospital staff.

It was the duty of the Superior, first of all, to choose a Sister, “who will preside over the others” as “Ministra”, and a “suitable” companion whose duty is to identify the needs and record them in a book during the weekly visit.

*“The Superior will choose from among the Sisters one, whom she thinks most suitable on account of her charity, prudence, wisdom and age, to be in charge, we may say, of her other Sisters and another suitable companion for the visits to the hospital....”<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> M.d.C., Rules for the Hospital, U.R., p.158-159.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> M.d.C., Rules for the Hospital, U.R., p. 159-160.

In another part of the Unabridged Rules, regarding the "Ministra" in particular, Magdalene pointed out the spiritual and human traits she ought to possess and the duties she had to perform:

*"...she must be a person of great interior spirit, prudent, gentle and zealous for souls..."*<sup>8</sup>

*"...she must, therefore, be invested with a great spirit of charity in her visits and gently gain the confidence of the sick in order to discover their spiritual needs...  
She must be exact in recording in her book the necessary reminders so that she may carry out all she ought in that week...  
Let her note well the various spiritual needs of the women patients so that, in arranging things with the superior, the Sisters may be sent to provide for these according to their spirit, ability and other circumstances..."*<sup>9</sup>

With regard to her relationship with other people working in the hospital, the Rules read:

*"...She must also use great gentleness and prudence with the nurses. She will also respectfully receive the Ladies of Charity in the place set aside for them and hear the reports of the needs found in the sick women visited by them.  
In the same manner the Sisters will report on the outcome of what they, in the course of the previous week, have done to accomplish what the Ladies recommended..."*<sup>10</sup>

It is also the Ministra's duty to animate and encourage the Sisters who collaborate with her in the ministry:

*"...she will direct her Sisters in this holy work according to the method laid down in the Rules on the Hospital...  
....she will teach them all she finds useful and necessary so that they can easily give the right remedy...  
...she must make sure that the Sisters really have done their duty and carried out all that they had been ordered to do...  
...caution and care not to expose the youngest and weakest of the Sisters as far as possible to contagious diseases..."*<sup>11</sup>.

The Ministra decided everything in agreement with the Superior and gave information also to the other Assistants of the House:

*" ...she arranges everything with the Superior and agrees with her about whatever concerns the Sisters...  
When she returns home she will report to the Superior...and every two weeks to all the Assistants...Let her reply with meekness and sincerity to all the Superior asks her and tells her to explain. In this way they may, together with the Divine Light, mutually help one another to make sure that in everything the Lord be always made known, loved, praised and our neighbours helped..."*<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> M.d.C. "The Ministra of the Hospital", U.R., p. 336.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 338

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 337

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 337-339

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 339-340.

About the others Sisters, who had to visit the sick women most in need during the week, the Rules for the Hospital runs as follows:

*"...when choosing the Sisters, the Superior will take into consideration their capacities, age, and talents which the Divine Mercy has deigned to pour out on the Sisters and any other circumstances which are left to her own judgement. However, she must never send the teachers of the School."*<sup>13</sup>

### **Number of Sisters, frequency and duration of the visits to the Hospital**

The number of Sisters was proportionate to the needs of the various hospitals and the number of Sisters each Superior could dispose of.

In Rule II it is stated that once the presiding Sister and her companion have spotted out the needs

*"...the Superior will choose a suitable number of Sisters according to the particular circumstances of the respective hospitals, towns and the number of Sisters she thinks available...."*<sup>14</sup>

The visits would be as many as possible, depending on the presence or not of the Pious Union of the Ladies of Charity.

These Ladies were present, as we have seen, in the Hospitals of Venice and Milan.

In these hospitals, the Ministra would establish relationship with the Pious Union in order to harmonize the work of the Institute with that of the Ladies, or rather, subordinating the work to that of the Ladies:

*"These must go there (to the hospital) for these visits at least once a week... In the towns, as here in Venice, where there is the Union of the Ladies of Charity, these Sisters will go to the hospital for the visit on the same day as these Ladies..."*<sup>15</sup>

In the towns where there was no Pious Union, the Ministra of the Hospital had to find out first of all the real situation of the sick and build up relationship with the staff of the Hospital so as to have access for the work:

*"In order to gain access to the Hospital in towns where there is no Union of Ladies, the Sisters will regulate themselves according to the suggestions of their Superiors...In this second case it will be necessary that the visits of the Sister in charge of the others be more frequent than in the first case as she must see the needs for herself in order to refer them to the Superior. Together these two will choose suitable Sisters to lend themselves to meet these needs..."*<sup>16</sup>

Regarding the Sisters selected for visiting the sick women following the visit made by the Ministra and her companion, the Rules say:

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 162

<sup>14</sup> M.d.C., Rules for the Hospital, U.R., p. 162.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>16</sup> M.d.C., Rules for the Hospital, U.R., p. 161-162.

*"...They will visit the number of beds assigned by the Superior, remaining in the hospital for the time laid down for them..."<sup>17</sup>*

### **Finding out the needs of the sick women**

The visits followed a certain modality. They were planned in such a way that the Sisters or the Ladies of Charity could find out the needs of the sick and record them down so that the Pious Union or the Institute could provide for them.

"The first of the two Sisters will take note in a book, which she will always bring with her to the hospital, of

*\* the name of the ward*

*\* the number of the bed*

*\* the particular need of the patient:*

*a) for the instruction*

*b) for help to be disposed to receive the Holy Sacraments*

*c) for simply some comfort, or advice to set her on the right path..."<sup>18</sup>*

### **To foster right motivation: prayer, discretion and gratuitousness**

"I was sick and you visited me"<sup>19</sup>: Certainly these words of Jesus echoed in Magdalene's heart when she defined in the Rules for the Hospital the inner attitudes, gestures and prayers which the Sisters should follow from the moment they left their house till they returned to it.

Magdalene invited them to make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament before leaving home or to place themselves before a Crucifix, so as to

*" \* recall themselves to the presence of God*

*\* rectify and purify anew their intentions*

*\* exercise their faith ever more*

*\* acknowledge in the light of this that they are going to visit the very person of Jesus Christ in those poor sick people."<sup>20</sup>*

Even their behaviour along the road had to show their awareness of and apostolic zeal for the mission of charity they were assigned to. In fact, we read:

*" \* Along the way they must keep a most modest bearing*

*\* walking sedately*

*\* they should not speak or laugh among themselves too loudly*

*\* nor should they stop to speak to anyone on any pretext.*

*\* When going and returning from the hospital to the House of the Institute the Sisters may never stop at any Church either for their own private devotion or much less for any other visits."<sup>21</sup>*

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 163.

<sup>18</sup> M.d.C., Rules for the Hospital, U.R., p. 160.

<sup>19</sup> Mt., 25,36.

<sup>20</sup> M.d.C., Rule for the Hospital, U.R., p. 163 Rule III.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. M.d.C., Rules for the Hospital, U.R., p.164 Rule V; p. 173 Rule XIV.

Once they were in the hospital, the Sisters had to go to the altar erected in the ward of the sick and

- \* put themselves in the presence of God*
- \* make an offering of all they are about to do*
- \* recite an Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be to their Holy Patrons and thrice the "Angel of God" to the Angels of the sick whom they will visit..."<sup>22</sup>*

After visiting the sick, always in the hospital, the Sisters thanked the Lord reciting

- \*\* the Agimus*
- \* "3 Gloria and the Sub Tuum presidium, recommending the sick to the Lord and to Most HolyMary ".<sup>23</sup>*

After returning to the Institute, before resuming their work,

*"..they will go immediately to the Superior. She will first of all send them to pray a while in order for them to own and humiliate themselves for any faults they may have committed against Holy Charity... ".<sup>24</sup>*

Right intention had to be clearly shown, especially when meeting persons, marked with modesty, patience and gratuitousness. Magdalene, a practical woman, being aware of the difficulties the Sisters could face in assisting the sick, invited them to act justly before the Lord, when dealing with the Directors, the doctors, the chaplains and other staff in the hospital, and to speak sparingly:

*"Let the Sisters...speak with all respect, humility and submission to all the priests assisting in the hospital when they have to notify them about any of the patients...in some public place...  
...with the doctors, surgeons, porters or any other hospital workers ...they must be most civil and reply firmly when they are questioned by them. As far as can be avoided they should not get into any discussion with them."<sup>25</sup>*

With regard to the Head of the Hospital, the nurses and the other workers, the Sisters should behave:

*" with gentleness, good manners and dependence in all that their Rule and spirit of charity allows.  
- treat even these (the nurses) like their Sisters and try to achieve their sanctification as much as possible."<sup>26</sup>*

Regarding establishing a fine relationship with the sick, our Saintly Foundress, to help her daughters in carrying out their mission of charity, made them aware of pitfalls, recommending them not to fall into curiosity, back-biting, superficiality, waste of time, thus annulling their witnessing.

In fact, the Daughter of Charity was not allowed to

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Ibid., p. 164-165, Rule VI.

<sup>23</sup> M.d.C. Rules for the Hospital, U.R., p. 170, Rule VIII.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Ibid. , p. 171-172.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Rules for the Hospital, U.R., p. 172, Rule XI.

- “\* *ask the kind of illness the sick have or inquire about the causes*
- \* *give the poor ready occasion to grumble*
- \* *lose the merit of charity by any all too natural liking for one or other of the patients,*
- \* *stop in idle chatter with the sick*
- \* *engage in superfluous talk with the priests whether it be on spiritual or indifferent topics.*
- \* *go to their rooms or houses, though in twos*
- \* *deal unnecessarily with the doctors, surgeons, porters or other hospital workers*
- \* *make friends and build special bonds of friendship with nurses and servers.”<sup>27</sup>*

**Magdalene of Canossa wanted the Sisters to observe scrupulously the Rules for the Hospital in all these items, therefore she strongly exhorted them:**

*“If the observance of the Rules is necessary and indispensable for the sanctification of the Sisters, the preservation of the spirit of the Institute and the edification of our neighbours, for all these reasons, the strictest observance of the Rules of the Hospital is likewise most necessary for the Sisters.*

*The Sisters are reminded that not even the smallest rule is written without a reason. They should tremble at the thought of deliberately breaking even the least one as they do not know what abuses this may lead to.”<sup>28</sup>*

In order to ensure that hospital visitation be always an apostolic service with a pastoral aim, Magdalene formally forbade the Sisters to receive any gift, and recommended that their service be characterized by gratuitousness:

- “The Sisters may not receive from any sick*
- \* *even the smallest thing as a gift*
  - \* *out of gratitude or remembrance...or alms*
  - \* *not even offerings for the House, under the name of charity*
  - \* *or in order to have prayers said after their death*
- The Sisters will do everything not out of self interest but for the love of the Lord.”<sup>29</sup>*

The "reward of the work of charity would be CHARITY itself".

"Magdalene stressed always the love of Christ Crucified, a true, authentic love, a love which means imitation, a love which is not made up just of beautiful words and sentimentalism, but it is proved by deeds, by serving the most needy brothers with boundless generosity, up to total self-giving."<sup>30</sup>

Christ Himself will be our reward.

**We read:**

*“... that divine Saviour who made Himself obedient unto death and even death on the Cross for us will give them ample reward even here on earth, with blessings on their efforts according to the norm and measure of their obedience to the same Rules”.<sup>31</sup>*

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Ibid. U.R., p. 166-171

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 174

<sup>29</sup> M.d.C., Rules for the Hospital, U.R., pp.172-173, Rule XII.

<sup>30</sup> GIACON MODESTO, L'azione...o.c., p. 161.

<sup>31</sup> M.d.C., Rules for the Hospital, U.R., p. 174.

Obedience will shower Divine mercy on the Daughters of Charity and the seed will sprout and bear fruit in the field of their apostolate by their perseverance:

*" The Sisters should persevere in prayer, suffering and work and God will grant them, in a moment fraught with grace, to see some sick who for a long time did not want to listen, be persuaded by what she is being taught."*<sup>32</sup>

### **Style of the assistance: “meekness”, “patience”, “prudence”, “cautiousness”**

Rule VII is the core of the “Rules for the Hospital”: it outlines the Canossian style of assistance to the sick and enhances strongly its educational value.

It opens with Magdalene’s reminder of some connections existing between METHOD (“gentleness and patience in approaching the female sick), MOTIVATION ( we have to treat them as we would treat the Person of Jesus they represent”) and GOAL (“their “real good”). Such a reminder stresses special attitudes (“prudence and clear-sightedness...not to be drawn too easily by false compassion”) necessary in a situation of illness.<sup>33</sup>

It follows that the METHOD is a MODALITY OF COMMUNICATION characterized by gentleness and patience, attitudes which express the Love of God practised above all by Christ Crucified... for the salvation of men. Therefore, not to lose sight of the objective need, their “real good”, the Sisters were recommended prudent and clear-sighted discernment so as to avoid a false compassion.

The Rule mentions then some guidelines to follow for reaching the GOAL with regard to the three objectives of the ministry already outlined in the introduction:

1. *to comfort the sick women*
2. *to instruct and prepare them lovingly for the Sacraments, and even for a holy death if God has so destined ;*
3. *to try to obtain an improvement or a change of life in them should they recover.*

Regarding the first objective, it means to establish a gentle, cordial relationship and respect for the mystery the sick person represents.

Magdalene says:

*"If the Sisters are really as they ought to be, in love with the Lord and with Heaven, then it will be easy for them to comfort the sick effectively."*<sup>34</sup>

With reference to the second objective, brief and subsequent actions are suggested, according to the disease of the sick: just for this reason there are frequent recommendations not to tire the infirm, but to instruct them “little by little” and “with appropriate breaks”.

Finally, with regard to fostering a change or improvement in the life of those who would recover, the Sisters

- "- should try to bring it about by making them reflect seriously on the path they are taking and will inevitably find themselves on again.*
- they should also make them reflect on how vain it will then be to regret what they have omitted to do and should have done or what they have done and should not have."*<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> M.d.C., On the Ministra of the Hospital, U.R., p. 338.

<sup>33</sup> M.d.C., Rules for the Hospital, U.R. p. 166

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 166

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Ibid.,p.167

The Sisters should also try to give them guidelines and tips and provide them with work, if necessary, with the help of the Ladies or other pious persons:

*"Let the Sisters try to strengthen them in their good resolutions:*

- \* see to it that they have the support of good Confessors;*
- \* resolve to attend Christian Doctrine*
- \* educate their children in the best way they know and can.*

The Sisters will arrange ways with the Ladies, or failing these, with some pious persons,

- \* to plan how to bring about any reconciliation if need be,*
- \* to really try every way to obtain*
  - work*
  - a place where to serve*
  - or any other similar provisions for them."<sup>36</sup>*

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. Ibid.

IMPLEMENTATION  
OF  
MAGDALENE'S  
PROJECTS FOR THE SICK

## CHAPTER 7

### THE THIRD MINISTRY OF CHARITY IN THE HOUSES FOUNDED BY MAGDALENE

Magdalene not only wrote the “Rules for the Hospital”, but, together with her first daughters, began concretely in 1812 in Venice and in 1816 in Milan the assistance of the sick in the Hospital as a specific Ministry of the Institute.

As we have mentioned earlier, even before the year 1808 the young Marchioness had special concern for Hospital activity.

Documentation is scanty in this regard, but sufficient to help us understand how much Magdalene wished to involve herself personally and through her daughters, in helping, comforting and instructing the poor sick women in the Hospitals.

#### At Verona

Magdalene, for various reasons, could not begin the 3rd Branch of Charity in Verona.<sup>1</sup>

Which were these “various circumstances” that have prevented the third Ministry from being implemented at once in Verona?

The delay was first of all due to the fact that Magdalene was often away from Verona. In fact, historical events had compelled her to stop longer in Venice.

Secondly, the permanence of Leopoldina Naudet<sup>2</sup> who remained in St. Joseph’s with her group up to the year 1816 also contributed to the delay. In fact, pastoral care of the sick was not an apostolic activity of the Institute Leopoldina was about to found.

Only on 26 January 1826, Magdalene could communicate to her spiritual daughter, Elena Bernardi, Superior of Milan, the good news that also in Verona the third ministry of charity had started:

*“I like to inform you, this time, that next Saturday, God willing, we shall begin to make our visits to the hospital, though moderately. Meanwhile, in this way, we are going to establish all the Branches of the Institute”.*<sup>3</sup>

#### At Venice

At Venice, instead, Magdalene and the two companions, Elizabeth Mezzaroli and Frances Mary Ghezzi, as soon as they had settled themselves in the small house in St. Andrew’s district, went to visit the sick in the Hospital of the Incurable and their human tenderness was enriched by exquisite faith and charity.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Md.C. Detailed Report on the early Institute, up to the year 1816, in Ep. I, p. 435.

<sup>2</sup> Leopoldina Naudet: was born in Florence in 1773. Her father was a Frenchman, whose family had been transferred there when he entered the service of the Grand Duke of Toscana. Orphaned very young of both parents, she was summoned to live at court, first in Florence and later in Vienna. Together with the Archduchess Maria Anna and her sister Luise, she was animator and Superior, from 1801, of the newly founded Institute of the 'Dilette di Gesù' (= beloved of Jesus), which had an Ignatian character. Unfortunately the Institute did not last long. After many trials she sought shelter, with her companion, Sofia Gagnère, in Murano. When they were in Venice they followed the advice of Monsignor Pacetti, who invited them to go to Verona to collaborate with Magdalene of Canossa in the work of the foundation of her Institute. From 1808 to 1816 both groups lived together. Magdalene nominated Leopoldina Superior of the Convent of St. Joseph. Leopoldina remained in that position until she left for the Monastery of the 'Terasas' in Cittadella Square in Verona, where she started the new Institute of the 'Sisters of the Holy Family'. She died in Verona in 1834.

<sup>3</sup> M.d.C., to E. Bernardi, 26 January 1826, Ep. III/2, p. 1308.

We read in the *Memoirs*:

*“After this initial stage (of the House of Venice), as there were only three of us...they did not take up any particular work except visits to the hospital...”*<sup>4</sup>

And on 30 December 1812, she wrote to her brother Boniface as follows:

*“I am dropping you just one line from the hospital where I am for the usual visit”*.<sup>5</sup>

In Venice, the first beneficiaries of the charitable work of the Daughters of Charity were the sick women in the Hospital.

Five months after the opening of the house, Magdalene spoke of “*our usual visit*”, therefore about an activity already well initiated.

When describing her two mystical experiences in the *Memoirs*, Magdalene confirmed that it was her custom to go often to the hospital to visit the sick.

It was 21 May 1813. Once, while on the way for her usual visit to the sick women of the Hospital of the Incurables, facing the Giudecca Canal, she stopped in the Church of the Gesuati to attend the Eucharistic Celebration. She was united so strongly to her Lord that she felt very weak and could hardly continue her way to the hospital:

*“While I was on my way to the hospital to visit the infirm, I went to hear Mass in the Church of the Dominican Fathers...I felt my soul drawn to unite itself... with God as God... The Mass lasted just for an instant, at least so I thought. I remained however drained of physical strength and had difficulty in gathering myself up to go to the hospital...”*<sup>6</sup>

She had the same experience on 7 September 1813; at this time Magdalene was attending Mass in the church of St. Barnaba:

*“Another time, while I was on my way to the hospital, I stopped at a church along the way to assist at Holy Mass”*.<sup>7</sup>

After Magdalene’s departure from Venice, the Daughters of Charity carried on their apostolic activities, including visiting the sick in the Hospital. This is confirmed by the letter, dated 30 June 1827, which Magdalene wrote to the Royal Imperial Municipal Congregation of Venice to comply with their request for statistics regarding the works carried out in the House of St. Lucy in Venice:

*“The undersigned is privileged to inform you how, in the House of the Daughters of Charity of St. Lucy, ...there are... all the Rules and discipline of the various activities of the Institute, like the visit to the sick in the civil hospital, gratuitous charitable assistance for the most needy and for the poorest girls, and the assistance to the parish Christian doctrine...”*<sup>8</sup>

On 26 June 1829, also the Patriarch of Venice, Msgr. James Monico<sup>9</sup>, expressed to Magdalene his satisfaction about the works of the Institute:

*“Being placed by divine disposition at the helm of the spiritual administration of this illustrious metropolis, we consider it a special grace from heaven to have an Institute which*

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<sup>4</sup> M.d.C., *Memoirs*, p. 100.

<sup>5</sup> M.d.C., to Boniface, 30 December 1812, Ep. III/5, p. 3920.

<sup>6</sup> M.d.C., *Memoirs*, pp. 153-154

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* p. 170

<sup>8</sup> M.d.C., to the I.R. Municipal Congregation of Venice, 30 June 1827, Ep. II/1, p. 162.

<sup>9</sup> Msgr. Monico James : was born in Riese in 1778. He was ordained priest in 1800, in 1822 he was consecrated Bishop of Ceneda, in 1829 he became Patriarch of Venice and in 1833 he was created Cardinal. He died in Venice in 1851.

*brings much comfort to the poor sick, does much good to the poor girls and is so edifying for the Christian Ladies*".<sup>10</sup>

## At Milan

After much waiting and repeated requests, Magdalene finally arrived in Milan on 18 July 1816, together with Cristina Pilotti (her secretary), Elena Bernardi and Angela Simeoni to begin the third House of the Institute.

Her friend Caroline Durini had rented seven rooms for them in the parish house of St. Stephen. They were furnished only with the necessary items, as the Sainly Foundress wished. With the consent of the parish priest, Don Francis Maria Zoppi<sup>11</sup> and Countess C. Durini, the Foundress decided to start one "Branch" of work at a time. She began first with Hospital visitation. "Caroline Trotti Durini, who had replaced her sister Terese, was, for the past eleven years, Prioress of the Pious Union of the Hospital Ladies, in Milan. Therefore, it was not difficult for her to enrol at once her dear friend and her spiritual daughters as members of the Hospital Ladies so as to give them the opportunity to have immediate access to the Cà Granda".<sup>12</sup>

We read in the Chronicles of the House of Milan:

*"The above mentioned pious Lady (Countess C. Durini) was the so-called Directress of the Pious Union of the Hospital. Since everybody was in favour of her proposal, it was easy for her to enrol Marchioness Magdalene of Canossa and her daughters as members of the Pious Union; in this way, the (not yet called) Daughters of Charity had the opportunity to enter the Hospital at the time which was more suitable to them and to assist spiritually the infirm women. This was for two months their main and, we might say, the only charitable occupation. Besides, they devoted themselves to their spiritual practices and practical duties for the rest of the time. The result of their visits help us to gauge what was the motivating factor that urged them in their visits which they carried out several times each day, always preceding them with fervent prayers and penance; they approached, with right intention and faith vision, the women who were most in need of comfort for being abandoned, those most in need of instruction and advice which the Ladies, purposely, left to them, so that, though they were wearing the common women's dress, people could spot them out because charity, their mother, shone forth in them".<sup>13</sup>*

The Chronicles then record the episode of the young Hebrew girl who was converted through the catechetical skill and perseverance of the first Superior of the House of Milan, Elena Bernardi, whose apostolic zeal<sup>14</sup> was known to Magdalene. It was the first fruit of the fire of love burning in the heart of these zealous daughters of Magdalene of Canossa.

Through their enrolment in the Pious Union, the Daughters of Charity ensured stability to their apostolic work in the Hospital and the opportunity to carry it out in harmony with the Milanese Ladies and the medical and religious authorities.

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<sup>10</sup> Monico Msgr. James, to M.d.C., 26 June 1829, Ep. II/1, p. 249.

<sup>11</sup> Msgr. Francis Mary Zoppi: was born in Canobio in 1765. He graduated in Theology and Canon Law at Pavia University. He was an oblate priest. He was rector of the Seminary from 1799 to 1803. He was parish priest of St. Stephen's Church in Milan for 15 years. After Msgr. Pacetti's death in 1819, he replaced him as director of Magdalene's work. In 1823 he was elected Bishop of Massa Carrara and remained there up to the year 1832. Then, he returned to Milan and died in his retirement place at Canobio in 1841.

<sup>12</sup> MICHELINI V., *Le Amicizie...*o.c. p. 87.

<sup>13</sup> Chronicles of the House of Milan, 1816, A.C.R.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Chronicles of the House of Milan, 1816, A.C.R..

They continued visiting the hospital also after initiating the other ministries of charity of the Institute. What counted most in the Hospital was not to be present full time, but having charity as the main goal and a heart open to all the works of mercy.<sup>15</sup>

On 7 August 1822, Elena Bernardi expressed her concern for the sick women in hospital and Magdalene replied to her:

*“ I, too, have the hospital very much at heart. This is a very big part of the world to conquer, but a great deal of prayer is needed. ”*<sup>16</sup>

On 3 December 1824, Magdalene, to please Msgr. Zoppi, who was elected Bishop of Massa Carrara, informed him of the apostolic work going on in Milan and in his parish of St. Stephen, first House of the Daughters of Charity in the Lombard city:

*“...the companions in this House (S. Stephen), besides our charitable activities, have also almost entirely the visits to the hospital. ”*<sup>17</sup>

Looking at the “Prospectus” of the House of the Daughters of Charity in Milan we realize that the visits to the Hospital were organized as years passed by. They indicate the number of Sisters engaged in visiting the sick in hospital up to the year 1833; we can infer that, after this date, those who were engaged in this ministry were: the Ministra, the nurses of the community and the door-keepers who alternated with some other Sisters.

The personnel was equally divided among the various activities:

| <b>Year</b> | <b>Sisters visiting the hospital</b> | <b>Total Members</b> |
|-------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1823        | 4                                    | 14                   |
| 1824        | 4                                    | 17                   |
| 1825        | 4                                    | 18                   |
| 1826        | 6                                    | 18                   |
| 1827        | 5                                    | 23                   |
| 1828        | 6                                    | 25                   |
| 1829        | 5                                    | 23                   |
| 1830        | 5                                    | 27                   |
| 1831        | 6                                    | 29                   |
| 1832        | 6                                    | 29                   |
| 1833        | 5                                    | 30                   |

### **At Bergamo**

The Foundress did not think it opportune to initiate the third ministry in the House of Bergamo and gave her reasons for this.

To the Superior of Bergamo, Domenica Faccioli, who wrote to her that she had gone with the Companions to visit some sick women in the hospital, Magdalene, on 7 May 1828 replied that she was in favour if it meant occasional or extraordinary visits, but she was not of the opinion to

<sup>15</sup> CF. MICHELINI V., *Le Amicizie...* o.c. p. 90.

<sup>16</sup> M.d.C., to E. Bernardi, 7 August 1822, Ep. III/1, p. 546.

<sup>17</sup> M.d.C., to Msgr. Zoppi, 3 December 1824, II/2, p. 1057.

begin, for the time being, going to visit the sick in a systematic way. She concluded saying that, if the Lord would give her new light on the matter, she would write to her promptly.<sup>18</sup>

On 1st July 1828, the Marchioness managed to write to Don John Zanetti to communicate to him her opinion about hospital visitation that her Daughters in Bergamo wanted to initiate in a stable manner. She listed the difficulties to overcome before implementing the “Branch of Charity” considered by the *Rule*:

*“...It is a long time I wished to write to you ...but I was hampered by various and always new commitments up to now. I take the chance, now, as I am somewhat available...to say a word about this House...”*

*The good companions had written to me when I was in Venice about their wish to begin hospital visitation. To tell you frankly, I would not have had any difficulty to let them go, as your charity advised them to, and as they do already go occasionally in accordance with your opinion. So I wrote to them that they had done well to go, after your advice, visiting the sick on that occasion... However, I am not convinced that they should begin to take it as a branch of the Institute and to do it as it is done in other countries. In fact, they are still too few in number and when it is appropriate for the Superior to go, it is necessary that she will bring along a young Sister as companion. I am not of the opinion that there should be communication with men in the hospital, especially by young companions. Finally, to begin the branch and carry it on in every place, I have begun to do so first, so as to know the difficulties and dangers it entails, before exposing my companions...I beg you also to tell me your opinion regarding this. I gave a negative reply because I wanted to know your opinion, first”.*<sup>19</sup>

Don John Zanetti, after examining the circumstances and considering the difficulties, replied to Magdalene expressing his opinion against beginning the third ministry in the House of Bergamo.

## **At Trent**

Different was Magdalene’s approach with her Daughters of the Community of Trent.

To the Superior Margherita Rosmini, who expressed to her the need to begin in Trent the Branch of the visits to the sick women to respond to the request made to her by the Chaplain of the Hospital, Magdalene, on 11 January 1830, replied that it would be a very good thing. However she wanted her to consult Msgr. Sardagna<sup>20</sup>, and advised her to begin in the milder season ( as it was January) and to go to the hospital once a week only, due to the limited number of Sisters.<sup>21</sup>

Except for Milan and Venice, there is scarce documentation in the Archives of the various Houses about this ministry of charity. It is so scarce that it is impossible to reconstruct the main stages of this apostolate and to make an overall assessment of it.

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. M.d.C., to D. Faccioli, 7 May 1828, Ep. 1828. III/3, p. 1922.

<sup>19</sup> M.d.C., to Don John Zanetti, 1 July 1828, Ep. II/1, pp. 443-445.

<sup>20</sup> Msgr. Charles Emanuel Sardagna (1772-1840). In 1802 he was a Canon at the Cathedral of Trent, then Vicar General of the Diocese. He was consecrated Bishop of Cremona in 1831.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. M.d.C., to M. Rosmini, 11 January 1830, Ep. III/3, p. 2262.

## CHAPTER 8

### MAGDALENE OF CANOSSA AND THE HOSPITAL FOR CONVALESCENTS

Magdalene's heart was open to all miseries. A mother who cared for all her children, she wished to embrace in her charitable plan all those who were in need.

Before founding the Institute she felt sorry not to be able to help many poor girls who were leaving the Hospital and had no moral or material support.

She met them in her visits to the hospital, approached them when they were sick, cared for them, instructed them on the things of God, urged them to change their life, but once they were dismissed from hospital there was no alternative for them than the road.

Only in Venice, "the city of projects", she finally glimpsed the possibility of implementing her dream, that is, to open a house where she could assist convalescent girls and women until they had found an honest placement or, after regaining strength, could be able to work honestly so as to have their daily bread.

Still in the lagoon city, Magdalene found some noble ladies who were more sensitive to the need and would cooperate to prevent these girls leaving the hospital, from falling into evil. She also met a Religious who proposed to her to set up a house for the Convalescents.

On 12 June 1813, Magdalene expressed herself as follows with her friend C. Durini:

*".. my dear Caroline... you will say that Venice is the city where plans are made, and you are right, but the need gives rise to opportunities, though we may not know their result. You know that in the hospital we find often young girls and ladies of good will, but without support whatsoever; on the other hand God-fearing families try hard to find Christian ladies capable of serving. One male Religious thought that it is necessary to build a house for the convalescents who have no support when they leave the hospital, so as to finish instructing them in the things of the Lord and to establish them in the Christian way and also to train them in the skills suitable for the work and services they need to be prepared for."*<sup>1</sup>

Magdalene endorsed this project and, in the same letter, asked her Milanese friend to see if it was true that such a work was going on in Cremona and in Genoa, and if so, to get the Regulations for her.

The aim was beautiful, but the difficulties to overcome were many; time flew by and the implementation looked even further away.

Only in 1823 the project which Magdalene had so much at heart, began to take shape.

On 30 August 1823, Magdalene confided to the Superior of Venice, Giuseppa Terragnoli:

*"..I tell you both (Superior and Vice-Superior) confidentially that the business about the hospital for the Convalescents is starting well. These days, I will reflect on which steps both of you and myself should take... I confess, my dear daughter, this will bring me much consolation though we will face crosses, at least I expect them. If I could see established something which I have desired for such a long time, and if God grants me to see it well established, I believe it will be one of my greatest consolations in this world"*.<sup>2</sup>

The work began amid hardships, but Magdalene could count on the support of the Archpriest of St. Mark, Msgr. Albrizzi<sup>3</sup>, on the generous help of lay people headed by her two procurators of

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<sup>1</sup> M.d.C., to C. Durini, 12 June 1813, Ep., p. 378.

<sup>2</sup> M.d.C., to G. Terragnoli, 30 August 1823, Ep. III/1, p. 668

<sup>3</sup> Albrizzi Don Giuseppe Maria: Canon, Parish Priest from 1817. He died in 1828.

Venice: Joseph Alessandri<sup>4</sup> and Francis Padenghe<sup>5</sup> and on the co-operation of some Hospital Ladies, first of all, Lady Michieli,<sup>6</sup> spiritual daughter of Cardinal Zurla.

The Lay people, therefore, were the supporters of this new work.

Waiting was long and troublesome, but Magdalene did not get discouraged. Her faith and enthusiasm influenced the Ladies and the procurators of Venice who were working towards the implementation of Magdalene's old dream. Cardinal Zurla, writing to her from Rome, urged her not to desist from this enterprise:

*"The Lord will be greatly pleased with the House for the Convalescents... May God bless you in every one of your works, as I wish it with all my heart and I urge you to give glory to God and do good to your neighbours. Great needs, great ignorance, great indifference!"*<sup>7</sup>

### **"No money, no kingdom - but no fear"**

Faith in Providence made Magdalene zealous and creative. She began looking for generous benefactors. She urged the collaborators and wisely tried all alleys to find a suitable house for the incipient work.

On 17 September 1823, Magdalene wrote to G. Terragnoli, her spiritual daughter:

*"Now, I would like to say something about the Hospital for the convalescents, which is very dear to me. It is very funny to think of establishing a hospital without money and without a kingdom, but no fear. God will help us"*<sup>8</sup>

The two procurators, Joseph Alessandri and Francis Padenghe, persevered wonderfully in their work of finding a suitable place and funds to purchase it.

After some vain attempts, they turned to the ex-convent of the Campanare.<sup>9</sup>

Replying to the Superior of Venice, Magdalene exhorted her as follows:

*"I am very pleased to know that our very good Mr. Alessandri continues to work with concern for our hospital, which has just begun. When you see him, thank him, congratulate him on my behalf, but urge him strongly to see if the place he is now considering, that is, that of the 'Campanare', can be secluded from the neighbours nearby"*<sup>10</sup>

Writing to Cardinal Zurla on 25 August 1824, Magdalene informed him how the project was going on:

*"Work is on for the Hospital of the Convalescents. May Our Lady bless everything"*<sup>11</sup>

Funds were necessary for the purchase of the building and Magdalene wrote to G. Terragnoli to solicit the collaborators to search for benefactors so as to "implant the work in a solid manner":

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<sup>4</sup> Joseph Alessandri: was born in Venice in 1785; a very good and enterprising trader. He would become a procurator of the House in Venice.

<sup>5</sup> Francis Padenghe: was, together with Joseph Alessandri, on of the procurators of the Canossian work in Venice.

<sup>6</sup> Lady Michieli, cf. *ibid*, Ch. 4 note No. 52.

<sup>7</sup> Card. Placid Zurla, a M.d.C., 6 July 1824, Ep. II/1, p. 725.

<sup>8</sup> M.d.C., to G. Terragnoli, 17 September 1823, Epp. III/1, p. 678.

<sup>9</sup> Convent of the Campanare: it was at the present Rioterra, Sestiere S. Croce. It was a complex which was passed from State property to private property.

<sup>10</sup> M.d.C., to G. Terragnoli, 4 July 1824, Ep. III/2, p. 890.

<sup>11</sup> M.d.C., to Card. Zurla, 25 August 1824, Ep. II/1, p. 587.

*“ I was very happy to hear about the donation given by the very good Reali<sup>12</sup> for our hospital...I hope that Mr. Padenghe and good Mr. Alessandri will go in search of benefactors...”<sup>13</sup>*

The Sainly Foundress was constantly pursuing her clear objective: to “prevent evil” and to help the poor girls towards a sound Christian living.

Meanwhile, the project had started well. One of Magdalene’s letters to Msgr. Zoppi confirms this:

*“Also the business of the Hospital for the Convalescents seems to begin very well, but I think it will take time to complete it, because the devil will put up his defences”<sup>14</sup>*

On 19 January 1825, Magdalene wrote to the same person:

*“They wrote to me from Venice today about the purchaser (contract) made by those two good dealers (Alessandri and Padenghe) of a big part of the place they meant for the Hospital of the Convalescents. May the Lord now give me the true spirit and may I profit by this to work well, as the Lord opens many ways to me. For this I commend myself very much to your prayers”<sup>15</sup>*

As soon as she reached Venice, Magdalene informed Rosa Dabalà that the Convent of the Campanare had finally been bought:

*“The contract of our dear hospital was just concluded. They tell me that the houses will be vacant this August. My dear daughter, without adding any word, they will understand how much in need of prayer I am”<sup>16</sup>*

### **Let us hope to start the activity, at last ...**

The purchase of the whole complex made Magdalene think that the small Hospital would be set up soon.

On 6 June 1825, Magdalene expressed her mind to Cardinal Zurla:

*“The House for the Convalescents is definitely purchased. Now we are preparing little by little what is needed and this will take time because of the financial situation of the House of Venice”<sup>17</sup>*

The house needed renovation to be functional and Magdalene was tireless in soliciting and encouraging the collaborators.

On 21 March 1826, she wrote to Mr. Padenghe:

*“I cannot refrain from expressing my consolation as I hear the special blessing the Lord deigns to shower on your charitable endeavours and I fervently hope that the Lord, by His goodness, will provide for all the rest so as to supply ...all the indispensable renovations. You are not satisfied with all you are doing and kindly ask my opinion about the renovations to be*

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<sup>12</sup> Reali, the one who had purchased the Convent of the Campanare from the State property.

<sup>13</sup> M.d.C., to G. Terragnoli, 14 September 1824, Ep. III/2, p. 935-937.

<sup>14</sup> M.d.C., to Msgr. Zoppi, 1824, Ep. II/2, p. 1054-1055.

<sup>15</sup> M.d.C., to Msgr. Zoppi, 19 January 1825, Ep. II/2, pp. 1060-1061.

<sup>16</sup> M.d.C., to Dabalà, 7 May 1825, Ep. III/2, p. 1117.

<sup>17</sup> M.d.C., to Card. Zurla, 6 June 1825, Ep. II/1, p. 565.

*done. Believe me, you know better about these things when you sleep than I do when I am awake. However, since you wish to know my opinion... I think we should limit ourselves for the time being to whatever is indispensable".*<sup>18</sup>

In May 1826, Magdalene went to Venice and visited the convent of the Campanare where the Hospital of the Convalescents was initiating. All was proceeding well and, on 6 May 1826, she informed Elena Bernardi:

*"... regarding the business of the Hospital for the Convalescents, I realized that it was necessary for me to come.*

*This morning I went to see the locality of the Campanare, and I had to go around and to remain for some hours to settle about the renovations.*

*As things are going, it seems that it will be an excellent work. I certainly hope that the Lord will continue to bless it".*<sup>19</sup>

Magdalene wished that every detail be settled, but, alas, all the works of the Lord are marked by troubles and difficulties. The latter put to the test the work of the collaborators.

The sudden paralysis of Msgr. Albrizzi and the financial failure of Joseph Alessandri delayed the opening which took place only on 23 May 1828.

Since she knew well the reason for the delay, on 17 January 1828, Magdalene replied to Mr. Francis Padenghe as follows:

*"We cannot deny that, humanly speaking, the very serious illness of Monsignor Albrizzi and the misfortune of our very good Mr. Alessandri have delayed the work. I understand that the first needs much strength in this painful disease and the second looks very pitiful indeed. You cannot believe how much I feel for them and how much we pray for them...It seems that we are unworthy to be granted our petitions as we would like, but we shall keep on praying".*<sup>20</sup>

### **Finally the Hospital became a reality**

This work was for Magdalene one of her greatest consolations in life, a work she had longed for for years and was finally accomplished.

Magdalene communicated joyfully to her daughter Domenica Faccioli the official opening of the Hospital:

*".. Today, the hospital for the Convalescents was opened... you can just imagine how overburdened I am with affairs...".*<sup>21</sup>

And on 29 July 1828, she wrote to Msgr. Zoppi:

*".. I would tell you that...at Venice, the hospital for the Convalescents has started at last. Since it is at the initial stage, it is a source of worry, but it is going on well. Also the very worthy and holy Patriarch (Msgr. Monico) is giving us his full support".*<sup>22</sup>

Her joy was still deeper when she obtained the permission to have the Blessed Sacrament in the small church inside the hospital.

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<sup>18</sup> M.d.C., to Padenghe, 21 March 1826, Ep. II/2, p. 1212.

<sup>19</sup> M.d.C., to Bernardi, 6 May 1826, Ep. III/2, p. 1370.

<sup>20</sup> M.d.C., to Mr. Padenghe, 17 January 1828, Ep. II/2, p. 1216.

<sup>21</sup> M.d.C., to D. Faccioli, 24 May 1828, Ep. III/3, p. 1938.

<sup>22</sup> M.d.C., to Msgr. Zoppi, 29 July 1828, Ep. II/2, p. 1106.

Writing to Cardinal Zurla on 7 June 1828, she expressed herself as follows:

*"... We are consoled that at last the Hospital for the Convalescents was initiated. It was opened on Saturday, Pentecost Eve. We began on a small scale, but we hope much that the Lord will bless it. Lady Michieli is over-joyed. I involved her in getting permission for the Mass to be celebrated in the internal church of the hospital... and the grace to keep the Blessed Sacrament, for the benefit not only of the infirm... but so that they may receive Communion and also for the comfort of the poor convalescents and of the persons assisting them".*<sup>23</sup>

Card. Zurla replied on 21 June 1828, sending her the Rescript through Lady Michieli:

*"On this very day, I am sending to good Lady Michieli the Rescript about the Mass and the Blessed Sacrament for the House of the Convalescents. It is a day that is doubly blessed, (opening of the house of Trent) for both of us: I share in these events for I promised that I view this whole work to the Glory of God."*<sup>24</sup>

### **Trying to win over Marianna to be the directress**

The newly born Hospital of the Convalescents was for Magdalene "a work to the greater glory of God and to much benefit of souls". However, though it was the fruit of her zeal and was brought to completion with relentless hope, this work was not included in the *Three Branches of Charity* of her Institute.

Faithful to her charism, which did not allow her to take up responsibility for the management of the Hospital, Magdalene asked Marianna Francesconi,<sup>25</sup> a Daughter of Charity for ten years, for the sacrifice to leave the Institute so as to take up the management of the small Hospital.

The Ladies of Venice had made a request to have Marianne and their request was signed by Msgr. Albrizzi, parish priest of St. Mark and Marianna's spiritual director. The Marchioness, thinking that Marianne was the most suitable person to begin the work, consented to their request.

Marianna, who was very attached to the Institute, felt it was impossible for her to accept the request.

The saintly Foundress, through constant prayer and skill, guided her gently to move from opposition to accepting "joyfully" the work.

On 26 November 1823, Magdalene wrote to the Superior of Venice as follows:

*"Tell dear Lady Michieli that until the Lord does not move Marianna's heart it will be impossible for her to accept, since she does not want to leave our Houses. I am still hoping that the Lord may move her heart...*

*...Please offer three Holy Communions to honour the Most Holy Heart of the Mother of Mercy, so that, if God wills it, She may decide that this Sister be destined for that work of charity, otherwise, She may provide another person who is according to her adorable heart and suitable for the work".*<sup>26</sup>

After some months Magdalene began to hope and, on 4 February 1824, she wrote to Giuseppa Terragnoli:

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<sup>23</sup> M.d.C., to Cardinal Zurla, 7 June 1828, Ep. II/1, pp. 610-611.

<sup>24</sup> Card. Zurla to M.d.C., 21 June 1828, Ep. II/1, p. 730.

<sup>25</sup> Francesconi Marianna was from Padua. She was from a noble family. She entered the House of the Institute in Venice on 24 March 1813. She was spiritual daughter of the Archpriest of St. Mark, Msgr. Albrizzi, one of the benefactors of the Hospital of the Convalescents.

<sup>26</sup> M.d.C., to G. Terragnoli, 26 November 1823, Ep. III/1, p. 723.

*“Now I would say that I am quite sure that Marianna will accept. We need to pray.”*<sup>27</sup>

Meanwhile, Marianna met her spiritual director Msgr. Albrizzi who encouraged her to accept; Marianna convinced herself about the matter, but wished to keep on depending on the Sainly Foundress.

On 16 July 1824, Magdalene informed the Superior of Venice as follows:

*“I am consoled because Marianna (Francesconi) is happy and jubilant to embrace this work.”*<sup>28</sup>

In 1826, Marianna was in Venice. She was waiting to begin the work and Magdalene, who was in Milan, was close to her with her letters.

On 23 August 1826, Magdalene wrote to Giuseppa Terragnoli:

*“I hear that good Marianna has received my letter; I wish that she may really involve herself courageously in the work. I hope she will write to me later on”.*<sup>29</sup>

### **Drafting the Rules**

Magdalene prepared for Marianna a short draft of the Rules, a precious document which would help her for the running of the house.

A letter addressed to A. Bragato, initiated by the Foundress and continued by her secretary Rosa della Croce, confirms this:

*“It is already two days that the Marchioness is sitting at the desk hoping to have short and uninterrupted moments for drafting the Rules of the new hospital, but up to now, she did not make any draft, either because she is constantly interrupted by the Ladies, or is called to the parlour, or because of other business”.*<sup>30</sup>

The short manuscript bears the title “Rules for the Hospital of the Convalescents to be erected under the protection of Our Lady of Sorrows to whom these Rules will be dedicated”.

The document comprises a Preface and four articles.

First of all, it demands that persons who enter are only those who

*“...accept to be temporarily welcomed into the hospital for the Convalescents, as it is not a penitentiary or a place where people stay by force, but only a place where loving, Christian charity abides and where no one is accepted or kept by force and violence”.*<sup>31</sup>

The Convalescent, soon after entering, was placed under the protection of Our Lady of Sorrows. The Directress

*“...will treat her with motherly care, helping her to overcome her illness and recover her strength, through food, rest, encouragement, in short, treating her with utmost charity”.*<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> M.d.C., to G. Terragnoli, 4 February 1824, Ep. III/2, p. 794.

<sup>28</sup> M.d.C., to G. Terragnoli, 16 July 1824, Ep. III/2, p. 900.

<sup>29</sup> M.d.C., to G. Terragnoli, 23 August 1826, Ep. III/2, p. 1474.

<sup>30</sup> M.d.C., to A. Bragato, 22 May 1828, Ep. III/3, p. 1936.

<sup>31</sup> Rules for the Hospital of the Convalescents, manuscript Art. 2, p. 2, A3, XIII, A.C.R.

<sup>32</sup> Rules for the Hospital of the Convalescents, manuscript Art. 3, p. 4, A 3, XIII, A.C.R.

She went on with fine psychological insight:

*“She will try, by and by, to approach her gently so as to know her temperament and character in order to help her for the best, trying to get her to strengthen herself ever more in Christian living”.*<sup>33</sup>

Permanence in the nursing home aimed at helping these girls to recover their dignity and learn a skill, so that they could insert themselves back in society by living a Christian life and gaining their daily bread through an honest work. Therefore, the Directress

*“.....knowing her state of life, that is, whether she was a servant or lady-in- waiting or working in the country-side, or in the family, while she recovers gradually, the Directress will train her and perfect her according to her social status and duties, so that when she leaves the Hospital for the Convalescents she may be capable of carrying out her duties and gain her livelihood... will teach her well the Christian Doctrine of the Diocese and, if possible, besides training her in suitable skills, she will teach her to read so that, by reading, she will remember the spiritual things she has learnt”.*<sup>34</sup>

Though brief, the document contains norms of sound pedagogy and wisdom. They reveal the fire of charity which was burning in Magdalene’s heart.

### **The hour of separation**

Marianna Francesconi, though she experienced great suffering and was making a big sacrifice, consented to the wish of the Marchioness and gave herself boundlessly to help the poor girls entrusted to her. On 18 May 1828, Magdalene urged her companions to pray for her, writing to Angela Bragato:

*“Our good Marianna has mixed feelings of joy and sorrow. She is very happy to see how the Lord sends his bountiful blessings on all that should be for His greater glory and for the good of our neighbours. The latter are very happy in the hospital. Marianna is in sorrow because she has to leave us. She is crying much. She entrusts herself much to the prayers of all of us and I, too, ask you to pray a lot for the dear companion as well as for the Hospital”.*<sup>35</sup>

M. Francesconi had already begun the work and admitted, as agreed upon with the Foundress, only the young girls dismissed from the Civil Hospital, because the Marchioness feared that, by accepting others, the objective of the work might be distorted.

Magdalene, however, kept on looking after Marianna; she kept in touch with her by letter, also when she was far away.

The nursing home lasted for a short stretch of time. Shortly after Magdalene’s death, Marianna Francesconi, aged and tested by suffering, returned to the Institute and the Hospital for the Convalescents changed its typology and merged into another Institute of Venice, which was opened to help the poor girls, but with different objectives.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., A:C.R.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. A.C.R.

<sup>35</sup> M.d.C., to A. Bragato, 18 May 1828, Ep. III/3, pp. 1929-1930.

## CONCLUSION

Magdalene's writings, if we read them attentively, reveal to us not only her great heart as a Mother and sister, but in particular her "genius" in caring for the sick, first of all for the members of her noble family.

The young Canossa sets no limits to her activity, to her deep desire to serve the suffering brothers and sisters, above all the poorest and most abandoned, and visits them in the hospital, assists them personally and comforts them lovingly.

Her deep union with the Lord Jesus, whom she contemplates and loves, urges her to acknowledge the work of mercy of "hospital visitation" as the perennial and continuous ministry of charity which cannot be lacking in the apostolic mission of an Institute totally devoted to the practice of charity.

Magdalene's preference for those who, in their life, are called to experience sickness and are close to the final encounter with the Lord, urges, every Canossian Daughter of Charity, today, more than before, to extend charity and to care for people in a similar way, so that many may encounter the Lord and love Him.

Each person, today, in every part of the world, is in dire need of "being accompanied" along the journey, in particular in the "strong and difficult" moments of sorrow and suffering.

Every Canossian, therefore, in tune with Magdalene's experience, is called to be close to the sick so as to let shine forth the face of Jesus caring for the paralytic of Bethesda (cf. Jn 5: 1-9). Jesus' presence at the miraculous pool shows thoughtfulness, attentiveness, mercy. Jesus does not show off. He neither works spectacular gestures, nor dwells on long exhortations. He is only concerned with the sick person and stimulates him to entrust himself to Him, to welcome his healing which is a deep, radical and lasting healing.

Today, thanks to the precious contribution given by the teaching of the Church, by human sciences and by specific relational methodology, we too, together with our lay brothers and sisters and the health workers, are involved in this ministry of charity: the "Pastoral Care of the Sick". This service asks of us to place ourselves at the school of the Crucified Lord who, on the Cross, lived and donated His greatest love in a sublime manner. Following this logic of love and being faithful to our charism, we can continue, all along the years, Magdalene's zeal to be lovingly close to the sick.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

### DOCUMENTS OF THE INSTITUTE

- M.d.C. = Maddalena di Canossa (Magdalene of Canossa)  
Ep. = Epistolario (Epistulary)  
R. s.s. = Regole e scritti spirituali (Rule and Spiritual Writings)

### ARCHIVES AND LIBRARIES

- A.C.R. = Archivio Canossiano di Roma (Canossian Archives - Rome)  
A.F.G. = Archivio Figlie di Gesù Verona (Archives of the Sisters of Jesus - Verona)  
A.P.L.V. = Archivio Provincia Lombardo Veneta (Canossian Archives Verona)  
A.V.VR. = Archivio di Stato Verona (State Archives Verona)  
B.C.VR. = Biblioteca Civica Verona (Civic Library Verona)  
B.S.V.VR. = Biblioteca Seminario Vescovile Verona. (Library Episcopal Seminary Verona)  
A.C.M. = Archivio Canossiano di Milano (Canossian Archives Milan)

### OTHERS

- cf.* = *confront*  
*o.c.* = *work mentioned*  
*ms/mss* = *manuscript/s*  
*p./pp.* = *page-pages*  
*Pt.* = *Part*

## **I N D E X**

**Forword .**

**Introduction**

### **PART ONE**

#### ***MAGDALENE OF CANOSSA AND HER FLAIR FOR THE SICK***

##### **Chapter 1**

**The church and society at the end of XVIII C entury  
and early XIX Century**

Milan

Venice

Verona

##### **Chapter 2**

**Hospital Assistance in Verona and the “Sacred Brotherhood  
of Hospital Priests and Lay People”**

##### **Chapter 3**

**The Pious Union for charitable cctivities: an example of Lay Voluntary Service  
in Milan in the early XIX Century**

##### **Chapter 4**

**Magdalene of Canossa and the sick  
before founding the Institute**

- Her “flair for the sick”
- First training: serene and careful assistance to the sick in her family
- Magdalene of Canossa, a liaison between the fraterniy of Verona  
and the Pious Union of the Ladies of Milan

### **PART TWO**

#### ***PASTORAL CARE OF THE SICK IN THE PLANS OF MAGDALENE***

##### **Chapter 5**

**The Third Ministry of Charity  
in the first three Plans of the Institute**

- Plan B. 6-6.
- Plan B. 7-7
- General Plan of the Sisters of Charity. Plan B. 8-8

## **Chapter 6**

### **Magdalene of Canossa and the “Rules for the Hospital”**

- Introduction
- The third ministry and charism.
- The Rules: at the service of the sick, aiming at their “real good”
- Number of Sisters, frequency and duration of the visits to the hospital
- Finding out the needs of the sick women
- To foster right motivation: prayer, discretion and gratuitousness
- The Sisters are strongly exhorted to observe scrupulously the Rules for the Hospital
- We read:,,,,,,,,,
- Style of the assistance: ‘meekness’, ‘patience’, ‘prudence’, ‘cautiousness’

## **PART THREE**

### ***IMPLEMENTATION OF MAGDALENE’S PROJECT FOR THE SICK***

## **Chapter VII**

### **The Third Ministry of Charity in the Houses founded by Magdalene**

- At Verona
- At Venice
- At Milan
- At Bergamo
- At Trent

## **Chapter VIII**

### **Magdalene of Canossa and the Hospital for Convalescents**

- “No money, no kingdom - but no fear”
- Let us hope to start the activity at last
- Finally the Hospital became a reality
- Trying to win over Marianna to be the directress
- Drafting the rules
- The hour of separation

## **Conclusion**

## **Bibliography**

## **Abbreviations**