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Michele Colagiovanni, C.PP.S.

THE HIDDEN FATHER

Francesco Albertini and the Missionaries of the Precious Blood

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INTRODUCTION

Most people familiar with Saint Gaspar know that Francesco Albertini was his spiritual director and was largely responsible for nurturing Gaspar's devotion to the Precious Blood. Perhaps less well known is that it was Albertini, founder of the Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood, who wanted to see his association develop a clerical branch made up of priests who would renew the Church by spreading the devotion to the Blood of Christ. Albertini believed that Gaspar was exactly the right man to inaugurate this new venture, and he did all he could to encourage his beloved spiritual son to found the Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood.[1]

It is for this reason that Don Michele Colagiovanni has called Albertini the hidden father of the Missionaries.[2] Gaspar may have been the energetic organizer and administrator, the inspiring preacher who could attract men to the new institute, but Albertini, always in the background, had a significant role to play in its birth.

In this volume, Don Michele gives us a rich portrait of the hidden father of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood, from his birth in the Piazza Montanara in Rome to his premature death in Terracina, where he had only months before been installed as bishop. Along the way we get a fascinating glimpse of everyday life in Gaspar's Rome and the Papal States as well as a more rounded

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[1] The new institute was clerical in nature, even if there were many brothers, often called "brothers-in-service," in the Congregation. It is also worth noting here that Albertini envisioned a feminine branch of teaching sisters in the Archconfraternity, as did Gaspar, but that project was only realized later through the efforts of Saint Maria De Mattias and the Venerable John Merlini.

[2] In Italian, Colagiovanni dubs Albertini the "secret father" of the Missionaries. Because of the often pejorative connotation of the word *secret* in English, this title has been translated as the "hidden father."

picture of the events surrounding the founding of the C.PP.S. We also learn of two other figures who had their parts to play in establishing the new Congregation: Monsignor Belisario Cristaldi, an official of the Papal States who became in effect the protector of the Congregation, and Don Gaetano Bonanni, one of the first Missionaries and the founder of the "Gospel Workers," a band of priests who preached renewal in and around Rome.

The book gives a detailed account of the life endured by the priests who were exiled for refusing to take an oath of loyalty to Napoleon. Albertini and Gaspar shared part of their time in exile together, but were separated when Albertini was sent to Corsica and Gaspar ended up in the prisons at Imola and Lugo. Gaspar was actually on his way to Corsica early in 1814 when Napoleon was defeated and the exiled priests were allowed to return home.

Don Michele Colagiovanni, a member of the Italian Province, has been a lifelong student of the history of the Congregation and has engaged in extensive research. This volume is one of four in a series of biographies. The others treat Saint Gaspar, Biagio Valentini, and the Venerable John Merlini. Valentini and Merlini succeeded Gaspar as moderators general of the Congregation. Don Michele currently edits a monthly publication of the Italian Province, *Nel Segno del Sangue* (*In the Sign of the Blood*). He is the author of numerous articles and books.

Don Michele has based this biography on research from primary sources as stated in the *Notes* at the end of the book. There are a number of citations from these sources in the text. They have been left in quotation marks, but the sources of these quotations are not indicated because the author deliberately chose to keep footnotes to a minimum.

As the translation progressed, it became apparent that additional footnotes were needed, since many might not be familiar with certain terms and with some of the geographical

and historical references.

A few words about the translation are in order. In matters of capitalization and punctuation I have generally followed the Italian text when translating direct quotations. Quotations from the letters of Gaspar are generally from the translation made by the late Father Raymond Cera, C.PP.S. The English translation of the letters is available in digital form and also, in a limited edition, in photocopied form. The numbering of those letters refers to those used in the critical edition of the letters compiled by Don Beniamino Conti, C.PP.S. Translations of Bible texts are generally from the Revised Standard Version, although sometimes the Douai-Rheims version is used, since it follows the Latin text of the Vulgate, the version with which Saint Gaspar was familiar and which he quotes.

I am grateful, first of all, to the author, Don Michele Colagiovanni, for permitting me to translate his work and for his assistance in preparing this volume. I also wish to thank Jean Giesige, C.PP.S. Companion and Director of Communications for the Cincinnati Province of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood, for her skillful editorial suggestions and for attending to all the details required to get the book to press. Rachael Pope of the Cincinnati Province office staff also provided valuable suggestions and proofreading.

I hope that the publication of this volume will help many readers to learn more about the founding of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood, especially as we prepare to celebrate the two hundredth anniversary of that founding in 2015.

Jerome Stack, C.PP.S.

Chapter 1
DAILY LIFE

The Piazza Montanara was a progressive widening of the street of the same name. It was at its widest in front of the Teatro Marcello, on the right as one looked at that building. Several streets came together there to create the piazza, making it look like a comet with its tail.

Despite its irregular shape, it was among the great piazzas of Rome. It was total theater – before Luigi Pirandello[1] invented it – and was home to actors and an audience in dual roles, involving them – without their being conscious of it – in an endless performance. In a later age it could have been a reality show entitled Daily Life. On that stage, or at least in the wings, daily life assumed that dash of effervescence that it did not have elsewhere. It derived from the vague intuition of those who frequented the place that they were participating in a command performance, in a piece of theater.

The area was crowded with houses and humble dwellings fronted by a sort of ring of shops with canopies attached to the facades. Everything was sold here: utensils and vegetables, and meat, both preserved and freshly butchered. A bit of refinement was offered by a fountain, shaped like a chalice on top of a round basin that was raised slightly from the ground.[2] The gentle sound of the water could be heard only in the dead of night when the piazza was silent. Then, if one really strained, one could hear the rustling waters of the Tiber, whose current, divided by the Tiber Island, brushed against its banks like the watered silk

[1] Pirandello (1867–1936) was a noted Italian author, known especially for his plays, and was a Nobel laureate (1934).

[2] The fountain was moved when the piazza was destroyed and now stands in a little piazza on the Via dei Coronari.

of a cardinal's train.

As one looked around, little by little a backdrop appeared above the irregular, generally low roofs of the houses from street level: the Campidoglio, Monte Caprino, the Palatine and the Aventine.[3] These hills, according to common belief, were the origin of the name Montanara. In reality, the name derives from the noble family of the Montanari who lived here in times past.[4]

The most picturesque element of the backdrop was the Teatro Marcello. It is of massive construction, vaguely similar to the remains of the Coliseum, and had been the palace of the Savelli family. The edifice then passed to the Orsinis, but the nearby rise continued to be called Monte dei Savelli. Part of this little hill near the banks of the Tiber was formed by crumbled materials from the ancient past that had been compacted over time. Between the Teatro and the Tiber was the ghetto with its high wall and its stories.[5]

In the Piazza Montanara loafers and schemers would spend the better part of their day. The occasional passersby often became loafers as well, attracted by the variety of events that would take place there. They would run from one knot of people to another, attracted by laughter, by a shout, or simply by a gathering. They wanted to hear a salacious story, or the ravings of a drunk leaving some dive, lurching unsteadily down the street and

[3] The Campidoglio is the Capitoline Hill, the historic and current seat of the government of the city, located immediately to the northeast of the site of the Piazza. It is flanked by Monte Caprino. The Palatine was also close to the Piazza on the south; the Aventine Hill is further south.

[4] Another explanation for the name of the piazza is that it was frequented by the "mountain folk" or montanari, more or less equivalent to the American English slang, "hillbillies."

[5] The reference is to the Jewish ghetto, in which Jews at one time were required to live under some restrictive laws that were abrogated only in the latter part of the 19th century.

proclaiming his plans for reforming the world.

Perhaps they also wanted to hear the latest from Pasquino, a ruined statue on a corner near the Piazza Navona. Pasquino "talked" through the satirical pieces that were affixed to it secretly, by night. Often he talked with Marforio, Babuino, Facchino, Abate Luigi and Madama Lucrezia, other statutes in more or less in the same condition, but less famous. If one would ask why they were chosen as interpreters of the discontent of the people, one explanation might be that they were an unconscious choice. They were statues that had been subjected to violence and mutilation, nearly shapeless, and had risen to the status of icons. Their appearance reflected the condition of the inhabitants. Pasquino, even without any poster, declared ironically, by popular custom: *Civis romanus sum! I am a Roman citizen!*

– What did Pasquino say?

– How did Madame Lucrezia respond?

– Is Marforio keeping quiet?

Although not especially near the Piazza Montanara, the three stone personalities had as it were an important sounding board there. The sayings would arrive in distorted form, and the common folk would add the rest, as was befitting a theater on the city outskirts, because the area around the Teatro Marcello was on the periphery of Rome at that time.

The most famous flesh and blood personality of the place was without doubt the public scribe, immortalized in poetry by Giuseppe Gioachino Belli and in the art of the painter Bartolomeo Pinelli. He had his bench under a portico. Sun or rain, he waited for someone who wanted to send some news to another.

For those in a hurry he had a collection of texts already prepared. As if he were selling shoes, after obtaining the information from his client, the scribe would select the missive that was best suited for the occasion. During his free time

he would enlarge his repertoire, imagining sophisticated life circumstances of hypothetical customers, who were generally illiterate small-town servant girls and domestics. To purchase a ready-made, beautiful letter involved a minor expense and avoided the need to declare one's business in front of a bunch of curious people, who were attracted either by the confession of the customer or by the pompous way in which the scribe would put those declarations to paper.

A few steps from the Piazza Montanara was the church of San Giovanni Decollato (St. John the Beheaded), the seat of the famed confraternity dedicated to assisting those condemned to death. When the members of the confraternity went out in their hooded garb to carry out their duties they made a somber sight, and the people made the sign of the cross.

The houses huddled around the Piazza and on the streets radiating from it belonged to the nearby parish of San Nicola in Carcere. Besides the parish church there were also others: Santa Galla, Sant'Omobono, San Gregorio, Santa Maria in Vincis.[6] The jurisdiction of the parish extended beyond these: to the slopes of the Capitoline, to the Piazza della Consolazione and its hospitals. It went beyond the Arch of Septimius Severus, including the famous Campo Vaccino, as the Roman Forum was also called in those days prior to its excavation, as far as the Arch of Constantine, next to the Coliseum.

The surreal landscape of the Forums, with the Via Sacra, the precipice of the Palatine and, further on, the Coliseum, was

[6] San Nicola in Carcere, literally "Saint Nicholas in Prison," was constructed on the site of some Roman temples and a prison and incorporated materials from those ruins. The other churches mentioned were among the many churches that were not parish churches, but were constructed by wealthy families, guilds, or confraternities. They were often very important in the religious practice of ordinary people, even more important than the parish churches. The fragmentation of religious practice is discussed further in chapter 11.

an expanse of ruins that was sparsely inhabited. Popular piety had made churches and chapels out of some of the ruins that were suitable for the purpose. Pitiful people lived in hovels, and the glorious ruins were barns or pens for animals.

The parish also included the periphery, beginning with the isolated area called "of the Standing Column or of the Excise Office." The second isolated area was near the ancient Curia, which had been remodeled into a church in honor of Saint Adrian, "of the Fathers of Ransom."[7] It extended up to Santa Francesca Romana. From the Piazza San Gregorio a little street went up to San Bonaventura, "of the Friars of the Holy Retreat,"a very numerous community, more than fifty priests and lay brothers! The gate of the Villa Spada was close by. The area included the church of San Bonaventura with its houses and courtyard, the gunpowder factory with its storehouses and garden, the little gate of the Villa Farnesiana, opposite San Sebastiano and the main gate. Santa Maria Liberatrice was also here, and nearby, the round church of San Teodoro of the Congregation of the Sacconi.[8]

This vast territory was home to about two thousand five hundred people. They came from various places: they were from the Marches, Umbria, Lazio, Naples, Calabria and also a fair number from Milan and Tuscany. The parish priest kept careful records, even if sometimes he made some amazing approximations, for example declaring someone to be from

[7] The church was constructed incorporating the ruins of the Curia Julia or senate house constructed by Julius Caesar. It apparently had been entrusted to the Trinitarians, who were founded for the purpose of ransoming Christian captives from non-Christians as a result of the Crusades or of piracy. St. Gaspar's father was originally buried in this church but his remains were moved to Santa Maria in Trivio during the 1930s when the Curia was restored.

[8] The Sacconi were a burial society. St. Gaspar had subscribed to the society and would have been buried by them except for a hasty modification of his will shortly before his death.

Calabria, "that is, from Otranto."[9]

Probably all of Rome was structured like this, but it would not be far from the truth to imagine that the mixture in the marginal areas was even greater on account of the shady operators and drifters who landed there. In the empty spaces and in the ruins they found emergency shelter. In this sense the parish of San Nicola in Carcere and the adjoining parish of Santa Maria in Cosmedin, at the Bocca della Verità (the Mouth of Truth), had dramatic contrasts. The countryside was not only a few steps away, but it was wedged in by the press of the fabric of the city, since the ruins, reclaimed by the vegetation, were invaded by flocks of goats and sheep and herds of cows, as the place names suggest.[10] Tending the animals were wild young men, whom the nearness to the city made bold and uncontrollable. In addition, people from the countryside streamed in, bringing their products and seeking to purchase those things that only the city offered, whether legitimate or contraband.

The clientele made the shops of the zone especially lively, numerous and diverse, and there was an atmosphere of an ongoing fair. In the Via della Bufala, for example, one encountered, in order: the barber, the grocery store, the sausage shop, the nail maker, a nameless small hotel, the olive oil vendor, a nameless inn, the Hotel Bufalotta, the shoemaker, the saddle maker, the firewood vendor, the Pestoni Inn, and the fishmonger. The zone boasted some very attractive monuments of antiquity. The church of San Nicola in Carcere was a noble and ancient edifice, rising on the ruins of two pagan temples, one of which was dedicated to

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[9] Otranto is in Puglia, not Calabria, something that most Italians would recognize immediately.

[10] The Campo Vaccino, literally the "Cow Pasture," was the popular name for the area of the Roman Forum, which had not yet been excavated, and Monte Caprino, part of the Capitoline Hill, could be rendered as "Goat Mountain."

Piety and the other, so it was said, to Hope. When the ruins were joined together in the Middle Ages to make a Christian basilica, it was not necessary to exorcise the site, which had its origin in the cult of virtue that was also highly esteemed in the new religion.

At night, when darkness descended on the expanse of houses and ruins, the city became a wild forest. The glorious vestiges of the past, with their dark spaces, would swarm with men and women seeking some help with their lives. Christian piety had spurred the establishment of numerous charitable works to welcome beggars, wayward women, the sick. These people did not always accept treatment.

Not infrequently, in the morning one would find unknown persons in the streets of the parish who had died of sickness or poverty. Sometimes they had been murdered. Very often the deaths took place in the many inns of the area, where people lived disreputable lives.

In 1628 the parish numbered 476 families, for a total of 1877 souls. Of these, 1357 had made their first communion and 1325 had taken communion during the Easter Season. In the zone there were nine recorded whorehouses. One suspects that there may have been even more. A century later the population had risen to 2,500 souls. Certainly the number of these houses would also have increased to tempt the *barozzari* or carters, sellers of hay, shepherds and brokers, now more numerous than ever.

The sites that the Romans frequented most were the taverns. They were known to be places that were risky, treacherous. Here one would often find men and women who appeared to have nothing else to do but drink and engage in idle talk. They would gulp down their wine, sitting at filthy tables, and would hold forth with boorish and menacing discourses. The wine appeared to descend directly from the hills that surrounded the city.

One could also drink outside the *osterie*. There was

scarcely a young man or *barozzaro* who did not bring in wine under the counter, extolling it as better than those in the establishment. There was a persistent rumor that the hosts would water down their own wine. But the effects clearly showed that it was hardly water. Alcoholism was a cancerous wound from which flowed fights and, from the fights, knifings.

From time to time the osterie were subject to restrictive laws. The most drastic was called the *cancelletto*, literally, the "little gate," perhaps in the sense that the establishment would be gated for a violation of the law. In those cases, according to Pasquino, it was too easy to rhyme:

all'osteria il cancelletto
governo maledetto!

the osteria has been closed
cursed government!

Is it a bit disconcerting that such a city belonged to the pope? Such were the crosses and delights of papal temporal power.

Chapter 2
FROM INTRAGNA TO ROME

The Albertini family lived a thousand miles from the Piazza Montanara. Such a distance takes us beyond the Papal States and even beyond the Austrian possessions of Lombardo Veneto, to Switzerland, to Intragna in upper Ticino, to be precise.

The village had less than half the inhabitants of the parish of San Nicola in Carcere. The houses, with their slate roofs, all stood around the bell tower of the church, the highest in the region. The sharp spire of the bell tower lent a sense of verticality to the roofs sloping toward the ground and to life itself. It seemed to point to heaven just as did the surrounding mountains, so very green save for some peaks that were stony or covered with snow, depending on the season.

The upper basin of the river Ticino had been in the possession of the cities of Como and Milan through mutual agreement until the sixteenth century, when it became part of Switzerland. It is mountainous territory, divided in two by Monteceneri Pass. Its two principal cities are Bellinzona and Locarno. Today it remains under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Italian diocese of Como.

Intragna got its name from its position between two rivers: in Latin, *inter amnes*. According to another proposed etymology, the name was derived from the Latin *inter agnos*, between the lambs. This thesis is supported by the fact that many of the people kept flocks of sheep. This thesis is less convincing, even if lambs form part of the coat of arms of the city.

Intragna was – and still is – one of the many little villages customarily described as picturesque. Jobs were often hard and paid little. Even the natural beauty of the area could not compensate for living in poor and harsh circumstances.

The municipality or *comune* of Melozzo in the district of Locarno in the diocese of Como included the towns of Corcapolo, Vedasio and Gulino. The municipality is located at an altitude of about 350 meters, on a promontory overlooking the confluence of two rivers, the Melezzo and the Isorno (the two rivers referred to in the Latin name). Dominating the city was the very tall bell tower of the parish of Saint Gotthard, recently constructed. At this point the reader will want to know what a Swiss village has to do with the Piazza Montanara, with which we began our narrative.

Emigration of the people of Intragna to areas both near and far was common. Mountain people from the village were to be found in the northern Italian cities of Locarno, Bellinzona and Turin. Rome was much more distant, and emigration to that city requires some explanation. The immigrants from Intragna adapted themselves to a variety of trades: as shepherds, laborers, road workers, carpenters. Could they come to Rome to offer such services?

We do not wish to exaggerate how exceptional it was to find inhabitants of Intragna in Rome. "All roads lead to Rome," says an ancient proverb that certainly had a basis in fact, and that aptly described the status of the city at the time. It was teeming with foreigners, often famous, who came to Rome in search of excitement, and who had formed little colonies to serve their compatriots who came as pilgrims or tourists or as part of the diplomatic corps.

The Albertinis who lived in Intragna at the beginning of the 18th century belonged to the lower middle class. Their rise in social status took place in 1770 when Giovanni Battista Albertini married the niece of the pastor of the parish, Don Giuseppe Gaetano Maggetti. The Maggetti family, according to parish records, had the title of *signori*, unlike the Albertinis. At the same time the Albertinis, through another branch of the family, married

into the family of another priest of the parish, Don Leopoldo Innocenzo Baccalà, who became the canonical coadjutor of the archpriest Maggetti in 1780.

To step back for a moment: Giacomo Albertini had a son, Giovanni Pietro, commonly called Pietro, who married Giovanna Maria Baccalà, daughter of Bartolomeo. On December 3, 1736, the feast of Saint Francis Xavier, the couple had a son, baptized the same day with the name of Francesco Antonio.

It appears that the Albertinis were a close-knit family. Fervent Catholics, they educated their children in the sincere faith of their ancestors and in the veneration of the titular saint, Gotthard. The saint, bishop of Mille, was a hermit and was described as "father of the clergy and of the people." He had gained the respect and the veneration of the priests, whom he educated in culture and sanctity, particularly through his conferences on the Bible. Perhaps from the panegyrics delivered each year on the feast of Saint Gotthard, the mothers and fathers of Intragna had learned the importance of educating their children as well as the central role of the priest in social life.

Our story begins with the decision of Francesco Antonio Albertini, called Antonio, son of Giovanni Pietro and Giovanna Maria Baccalà, to set out for Rome. He left his native village at just over the age of twenty, around 1760. Did he leave by himself? We do not know with certainty, but we do find him in Rome a few years later in the area of the Piazza Montanara. It was quite a leap from the quiet Alpine valleys that formed reserved temperaments to the kaleidoscopic world of one of the most famous Roman piazzas.

To reach Rome, Albertini had only to follow the route of

pilgrims that were frequented more heavily on the occasion of jubilees.[1] He went down to Vercelli and then through Francigena, Mortara, Pavia, Piacenza, Fidenza, Luni, Lucca, Siena, Bolsena, Viterbo, Sutri. We do not know what occasioned this one-way trip. It was not during the celebration of a jubilee, but in some sense every human journey, every change in pasture[2] is a jubilee, because the traveler is a pilgrim who carries the worst on his shoulders and is guided by the hope of something better.

We believe that Albertini went to Rome by way of the Franciscans with whom he had ties. For example, we note that a Capuchin of Intragna, Father Paolo Maria Bustelli, was called to Rome as guardian in just those years.

By whatever consular road[3] he was following, a traveler who ended up in Rome would have the same impression: he or she would appear to have entered and to be moving in an unreal space, which was simultaneously a living city and an expanse of rubble. It was open country as well as the site of monuments. Giacomo Leopardi, who would arrive there in 1822, said: "The entire population of Rome would not fill the Piazza of Saint Peter's ...The great size of Rome serves only to multiply the distances and the number of steps one must climb to find what one is looking for.

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[1] Jubilee years, introduced by Pope Boniface VIII in 1300, were opportunities for pilgrims to Rome to gain a plenary indulgence, that is, a full remission of the temporal punishment due to one's sins. There have been twenty-eight jubilee years, the most recent being that of 2000 to inaugurate the new millennium.

[2] The author uses the Italian *transumanza*, a term for the twice-yearly migration of herds or flocks from higher to lower pastures and vice versa.

[3] The consular roads of the Roman Republic and Empire were so called because they were often named for the consuls who ordered their construction. The most famous of these is probably the Via Appia, but there are a number of others: Cassia, Aurelia, Flaminia, Salaria, Ostiense and so forth. Portions of some of these roads still exist, and the modern roads and highways that follow their routes still bear those names.

The immense factories and the interminable streets are so many spaces traveled between populated areas, instead of being spaces that are full of people…I do not wish to say that Rome appears to be uninhabited, but I do say that if all people needed to live so far apart, as they do in these palaces, and as they walk in these streets, piazzas and churches, the entire planet would not be able to contain the human race."

Antonio Albertini, in 1760, could have written the same lines with even greater truth. The Romans were even fewer than at the time of Leopardi; the urban fabric enclosed by the walls was the same.

During the glory days of the Roman Empire, Rome had a population of as many as two million inhabitants. In Antonio's day there would have been a hundred thousand. They were grouped in districts that were populous enough but were more like contiguous towns that had grown up around a center of power. On the periphery there were lonely streets that skirted basilicas, the pervasive ruins that were covered with vegetation, noble villas enclosed by walls, and palaces like fortresses. And in the middle, the river, also overgrown with the green of the reeds, sunk among the slopes that were sometimes shallow and sometimes steep. Here and there the bank would be crammed with houses that looked impermanent, as if they were meant to be carried off by floodwaters.

The people in these districts worked hard and depended on one another. Just as the poor houses stood up because they were built one next to the other, one fitted into the other, so were the domestic economies. Pitiful incomes allowed large families to survive, since they were accustomed to live on little, just like certain plants that seem to spring up and grow in the cracks of whitewashed walls. No one knew how they were able to live, but they were bursting with health, like new growth in springtime.

It goes without saying that Rome was a magnificent city: famous artists have left behind their accounts to this effect. An inhabitant of Rome at the time might have described the city as a ship laden with treasures that ended up wrecked and in pieces among the rocks. At low tide, in the light of sun or moon, the wreck coexisted with the magnificence of single objects scattered about; these continued to let shine their charm intact, even if neglected. The treasures of Rome, an immense crumbling ship, were the cupolas, campaniles, obelisks, arches, stretches of thousand year old walls, and pale white marbles that could spark the fantasy of visitors.

It was not prudent to venture out alone to the Coliseum or between the Palatine and Aventine hills, in the area around the Capitoline hill, to the Baths of Caracalla or of Diocletian, or around Saint John Lateran or Holy Cross in Jerusalem. By night these and other great archaeological areas became unsafe as though they were places in open country, or worse. The churches and palaces closed their great doors. Even during the day it was better to take some precautions on those lonely streets.

In such a city, a twenty-four year old from the mountains like Antonio Albertini would not do very well on his own. Was he in the service of some noble house or involved in some commercial venture? We are inclined to think that he had ties to the friars of Ara Coeli.[4] What kind of ties, we do not know. What is known to us is that one of the Franciscans of that famous convent was his spiritual director.

[4] The Church of the Ara Coeli (literally "Altar of Heaven") is on the Capitoline Hill and was entrusted to the Franciscans in the mid-thirteenth century. It was built on the site of the temple of Juno Moneta, considered to be the protectress of funds and once the site of the Roman mint. According to one legend, it was here that the Roman Sibyl or prophetess foretold the birth of Jesus to the emperor Augustus who had a vision of the Virgin Mary holding the child Jesus. It is the designated church of the city council of Rome.

Chapter 3
THE MAZZONESCHIS AND THE ALBERTINIS

The Mazzoneschis, the only family of that name in the parish of San Nicola, were originally from Spoleto. They lived along the Via Montanara, at the very point where the street widened into the piazza. Giuseppe, the head of the family, was forty-four in 1743, and had been married for about fifteen years to Elisabetta Benedictis, who was somewhat younger. They had three children: Domenico, Mariangela and Salvatore.

If the pastor had to compile a list of the most zealous families of the parish, the Mazzoneschis would have been at the top.

Giuseppe was a coppersmith (*calderaio*), and his shop was attached to the house, forming the ground floor. In front of the shop, along the street, he displayed his wares: pots of all dimensions and styles, cups, candelabras, lamps, braziers, scythes, spades and pruning hooks. His display ended where that of Giuseppe Rimedio, also a metalworker, began.

The coppersmiths had plenty of work. They had a large clientele, because the peasants and shepherds of the area around Rome poured into the Piazza Montanara to purchase goods either directly or by commissioning "commuters" who went to the capital to sell their animals and agricultural products.

Despite their rather comfortable circumstances, the Mazzoneschis did not own their own home. They paid rent to a certain Giuseppe Torino. Later they purchased the building. There was a third coppersmith in the parish, originally from Terni, who

had his shop near the Fontana Savelli, toward the rear of the Teatro Marcello. His name was Nicolò Anibaldi.

Domenico, Mariangela and Salvatore Mazzoneschi grew up to the noise of hammers that shaped the copper and of the wheels that formed the iron. The noises, sometimes clanging and sometimes muffled, were always present and echoed throughout the neighborhood, along with the voices of everyday life and the noise of the children. One heard the breath of the bellows necessary to melt the tin needed to plug the leaks in buckets and tubs or to heat the metal that was to be worked on the anvil. The children grew up in the shop, guided into the craft of their father, just as naturally as they learned to talk.

Elisabetta Benedictis was rather sickly and her health went into a rapid decline. In the course of a few years she became completely disabled and was not capable of caring for herself. The responsibilities of family life fell fully on Mariangela, more than would have been normally expected of a girl her age. She grew up quickly and became an energetic and active woman, accustomed to being on top of things, responding to family needs quickly and with simple care. In a certain way her tasks grew lighter when her mother died on October 17, 1761, at the age of fifty-two.

Mariangela's capacity for taking charge was strengthened by her family upbringing, in the sense that her brothers and even her widowed father accepted her aptitude quite naturally, above all because of their affection for her, but also because of their peaceful and submissive nature, which appeared to be characteristic of the Mazzoneschis. When she was only twenty, the daughter moved freely from the family shop to the things she needed to do in the house, like a true head of the family.

She was, moreover, a beautiful young woman. She had, as is said, a life ahead of her and she had it also within her, as evidenced by her irrepressible aspirations. In those days women

had to be circumspect. A bold glance or an unwise word spoken to someone would suffice to discredit a young woman. The strong willed Mariangela had to honor the taboo. Finding her a suitable situation was a family affair: that of her father and brothers.

The occasion presented itself when a certain Antonio Albertini, whom we have already met, began to frequent the shop. The marriage was considered to be suitable for both parties. The Mazzoneschis above all cared about honesty. Antonio Albertini, the Swiss, could profess to be a good man, and one heard only marvelous things about Mariangela. He was thirty, she twenty-six.

The marriage was celebrated on July 5, 1766, in the church of San Nicola in Carcere, witnessed by the assistant pastor Don Filippo Massaruti. The witnesses were Vittorio Calderi, Giovanni Bergamate and Bartolomeo Ghezzi, all northerners. This suggests that Albertini became part of a circle not strictly Roman, so he would not feel uprooted.

So the joining of two "foreign" families, one from Switzerland and the other from Umbria, took place. Taking into account what we have said about the composition of the Roman populace and in particular the area around the Piazza Montanara, this is not surprising. It would have been difficult to find a native Roman in those parts.

The Mazzoneschis could boast of an older and more deep-rooted presence in Rome, because they had arrived there earlier and came from an area less removed from the city. As a consequence, apart from any other consideration and apart from the strong-willed Mariangela, the predominance of the Mazzoneschis was guaranteed. The Albertinis settled in the house of the Mazzoneschis or in an adjacent house, forming a single large nuclear family.

On December 5, 1767, Mariangela gave birth to a little girl. In honor of her maternal grandmother she was given the name

Elisabetta Maria Geltrude. At the baptism, celebrated at the font of San Nicola in Carcere, her uncle Salvatore Mazzoneschi was the godfather. He will figure in nearly all succeeding baptisms.

The first boy was born at the close of day on Friday, June 8, 1770. Mariangela was assisted by the midwife Vittoria Torricelli. The room was lit by a few flickering candles.

On the occasion of a birth it was customary to pick some detail or peculiarity to make predictions about the child about to be born. Sometimes this served to break the strong tension that always accompanied the entrance of a new life into the world. So, when the little head of the baby appeared, Vittoria Torricelli cradled it in her expert hands and while she was making the appropriate movements, because the baby was slipping out very quickly, she could not keep from saying: "But this baby already has the tonsure!"[2] When the little body had emerged fully, it was confirmed that it was indeed a boy. "He'll be a great priest," she said.

The family had already determined that if this were a boy he would be called Francesco, in honor of Saint Francis of Paola. They had a great devotion to the hermit of Calabria: a great miracle worker, and one who favored the poor. Called to France by the king, who sought to be cured of a serious illness, Saint Francis helped him to confront his death.

Francesco Albertini was baptized on the day after his birth. To Francesco were added the names Felice Gioacchino Nicola. The sponsor by proxy was Don Filippo Delapis, represented in Rome by Salvatore Mazzoneschi. As usual, Don Filippo Massaruti celebrated the rite.

The presumed tonsure was not the only sign that

[2] Tonsure was a ritual cutting of the hair of the head to indicate that a man had entered the clerical or monastic state. In the case of priests, it was usually just a patch on the crown of the head that was kept shaved.

accompanied the infancy of Francesco. It was noted that he never cried. He was never the least bother to his parents. Even when hungry during the middle of the night, he remained quiet so as not to disturb his mother. Mariangela was aware of this immediately. Francesco had an incredible respect for her. She knew that she did not have to get up in the middle of the night to nurse him nor interrupt her housework during the day to do the same. The baby knew how to wait. Mariangela recounted this with great admiration to her friends. "No one has a son like this! He knows my schedule and respects it!"

Many babies were born in the parish of San Nicola in Carcere: one hundred seventeen in that year. In general the majority of children would not reach adulthood. In the course of that year, the parish registry noted the deaths of twenty-seven children, all infants. They lived for at most three years.

On April 3, 1772, at ten o'clock, Vincenzo Francesco Gioacchino was born. The godfather by proxy was Friar Angelo da Marino, of the Observant Friars Minor, represented as usual by Salvatore Mazzoneschi. Don Filippo Massaruti performed the baptism.

On September 23 of that year Giuseppe Mazzoneschi, the grandfather, died, a widower of some ten years. An important figure in the history of the family, he lived to the respectable age, for that time, of seventy-two years. He was buried in the parish church which he had always attended. According to custom, family members, friends, clients and many members of the metalworkers' association participated in the funeral rites.

Francesco was like a lump of dough in the hands of his mother. Mariangela could handle him as she wished, and the calm little one enjoyed it. She would tell everyone that this son of hers was born with a marvelous and incredible gift.

"He never gets upset!" she would say. "I can squeeze him as

much as I want and he smiles."

"He knows he is in his mother's arms," the people, called to witness the scene, would say.

Mother and child appeared to be playing all day long. When putting him to bed, Mariangela would say: "You, Francesco, now lie down and go to sleep!"

The baby would lay down, his hands on his cheeks, completely happy, and close his eyes. In the morning, when his mother went to pick him up, he was still there in the same position. He was happy to be picked up and happy to be awakened. "Like a loaf of bread," they would say.

With an oblong face, somewhat thin, a sharp chin and nose, little Francesco revealed his foreign origins at a glance. His forehead was broadened by two symmetrical indentations of the hairline above the temples. His brown hair, eyebrows and eyes increased the brightness of his appearance, which became very beautiful when he smiled.[3]

[3] This description of the physiognomy was obtained from the portrait of Albertini as an adult, executed posthumously at the request of Saint Gaspar del Bufalo. The completion of the portrait was somewhat troubled, as evidenced by the letters of Gaspar, who suggested continuing adjustments to the painter.

Chapter 4
THE SOURCES OF HIS SPIRITUALITY

People were living in curious times. Under pressure from the ideas of the enlightenment, the sovereigns of Europe started to become more progressive in order to hold on to their power. They bloomed suddenly like trees in the springtime, all becoming open, populist rulers. They sang the praises of the new ideas and of a marvelous future of social justice.

The term "progressivism" covers a vast and nearly all-encompassing field and thus is certain to provoke heated arguments even among those who judge it to be positive. Just imagine the conflict between the progressives and those who rejected progressivism. At the forefront of the latter was the Church. Convinced of having the fullness of progress in revelation, she could not accept an ideology based solely on human reason.

The Church saw her mission as putting the Gospel into action. It was precisely this that the Enlightenment rejected. Progress was to be fashioned by men and women through the triumph of reason, which had to free itself from every superstructure or superstition, and the first among these was revelation. An examination of the past showed that religion held the people in submission to the powerful. Such a reading of history was, for the Church, proof of the blinding of reason. Progress is not a value in itself. For example, there is also the progress of a mortal illness and this is how the Church viewed things, based on the early signs that the Enlightenment had succeeded to put into action.[1]

[1] The author here seems to be describing the Enlightenment as it developed in France. In other countries Enlightenment figures were not so hostile to religion. It was, however, the Enlightenment as interpreted (or distorted) by the French Revolution that had a great impact on the Church in Italy.

The battle against the Enlightenment unfortunately downplayed some of the sacrosanct expectations of that movement in the area of social organization: justice, the abolition of privileges, and the participation of the people in economic and legislative life. The Church should not have been opposed to these expectations. She should have put them into practice long ago.

The courts of Europe were caught between popular pressure and the hammer of the Church, in particular of the Jesuits, who were present in all of the palaces of power and were capable of influencing their politics. Eventually several sovereigns asked the pope to suppress the Jesuits. In the event that this did not take place, they posed the threat of the progress of Protestantism or of separating from Rome. Clement XIII had resisted; his successor Clement XIV gave in. On July 21, 1773, with the letter *Dominus ac Redemptor,* he suppressed the Jesuits, a large and aggressive congregation and a strong bulwark of Catholic doctrine.

Historians have held differing opinions on the event. Because of an unfortunate animosity among religious congregations, fringe elements of the Franciscans and Dominicans, rather than complaining about a decision that weakened the Church, rejoiced in the suppression. Voltaire and other figures of the Enlightenment along with the Jansenists supported the suppression. The pope, however, suffered much on account of his decision. He had made it to avoid even worse evils. He had reform at heart. He had feared that the sovereigns would truly carry out a generalized secession from the Church like that which had taken place in the time of Luther in Germany and Henry VIII in England.

The Society of Jesus had been suppressed, but not the Jesuits. Members of the congregation, both priests and lay brothers, continued to work in their territory, and one can imagine their mood. While one or the other might have been happy to be released from his vows, most carried a grudge, and with reason.

Some were within the parish boundaries of San Nicola in Carcere and frequented the church to celebrate Mass and hear confessions. They condemned the times and had ample arguments against the novelties that were appearing. "If the Society would still be in existence, things would be going differently." An expression like this was not only an outburst of nostalgia but was food for a growing desire for the restoration of the Society of Jesus.

Pope Clement dreamed of carrying out a revival of the Christian spirit, and the jubilee of 1775 was a great occasion for him. He ordered that the city prepare for the event with popular missions to be held in four different piazzas, from July 31 through August 15 of 1774. Some former Jesuits also preached these. They certainly could not attack the pope; they attacked the times and the spread of depravity.

Popular missions, a kind of preaching of the truths of faith, were energetic and often dramatic events, aimed at bringing the people back to Catholic doctrine and to devotional practices. The people were eager for the missions because, apart from any consideration of a transcendent nature, they livened up daily life. They were carried out with great fanfare, and the pope spoke at them many times. The predominant style was apologetic or defensive of the truths of faith. The Church was correct in every area.

Clement XIV endured physical pain, and the herpes from which he suffered made his face hard to look at. The Jesuits and their sympathizers pointed to this as a punishment from God. Out of spite, the enemies of the Jesuits maintained that the pope, who died on September 22, 1774, had been poisoned, obviously by the Jesuits. The autopsy proved the accusation to be unfounded.

His successor, Giannangelo Braschi, was elected on February 15, 1775. He took the name of Pius VI, in honor of the reforming pope who had implemented the directives of the Council of Trent. The new pope was very devoted to him. He put the jubilee

in motion using the letter of his predecessor, which he had published in Italian on February 25. The next day he opened the holy door of the Vatican Basilica while his delegates opened the doors of the other basilicas.

The holy year was in full swing when, in the Albertini home, a baby girl was born on May 21, 1775. She was called Elisabetta, because the firstborn sister had gone to be with her grandmother on August 24, 1774. The new arrival was named Elisabetta Lucia. She was baptized by Don Filippo Massaruti. The godparents were Salvatore Mazzoneschi and Maddalena Bardi. The midwife Caterina Sambuni assisted at the birth. We do not know what signs were seen by those present at the birth of this baby girl. Not many paths were open to women at the time.

The Albertini family was of the traditional mold. Antonio, both prior to and after his connection with the Mazzoneschi family, led an exemplary life – home, shop and church. He even had a spiritual director, a Franciscan friar from Ara Coeli, with whom he consulted frequently.

The Albertinis supported the Church and did not enter into argument with many of the worst aspects of the institution: the unbridled luxury of the ecclesiastics, the worldliness, and the nepotism. All of this was part of the mystery of a Church both holy and sinful. Despite all its flaws, there was no doubt that one encountered much holiness in the Church.

The family had a frugal lifestyle. Even if their economic circumstances were enviable, they did not throw money around for either food or clothing. They were not stingy, because they did not begrudge giving alms to the poor or providing for the needs of the parish church. It was a chosen way of life. At home they did not cultivate grand ambitions. San Francesco di Paola had written very severe rules for his followers, which contemplated a hermetic life and severe limitations on food. It appeared to the Mazzoneschis

and Albertinis that they had already ascended too high in the social scale.

Was it possible to live the life of a hermit in the Piazza Montanara while taking care of a business? Yes, indeed! The Albertinis showed a seriousness of manner, a discretion, even a dignity, that made them stand out from their surroundings. The business had its clientele not so much from the ability of the shop managers to hawk their wares, but because of their honesty. When one bought something from them one knew that one had purchased good merchandise at a fair price.

On July 30, 1778, another male child was born. To honor the name of the recently deceased grandfather, he was called Giuseppe Ignazio Nicola. He was baptized the following day and had as godparents Salvatore Mazzoneschi, as usual, and Anna Federici.

Amid the comings and goings of life and death, Francesco and Elisabetta stayed at home with the newborn. Francesco was eight and Elisabetta, six. Mariangela was accustomed to say that she could not have wished for a better husband nor hoped for better children. They were quiet and unassuming.

Pius VI wanted to start a new Renaissance in Rome. He loved pomp, culture, and also the fortunes of his own family. Through these he believed he could preserve the prestige of the papacy in Europe. The climate, however, was by nature as vast as it was deep. Conservative sovereigns, like the emperor of Austria, posed problems, as did those who were progressive. The dissolute fringes of the French Enlightenment, who dreamed of a new republican state, were the greatest problem. The Church had never before found itself in the midst of such diverse situations, and Pope Braschi possessed neither the temperament of a political genius nor the charisma of a saint.

Nevertheless, in 1779 he set out for Vienna in an attempt to head off some provisions that restricted the freedom of the

Church. He did not obtain much from the emperor, but the trip, repeated years later, produced a great emotional response among the faithful. The "apostolic pilgrim" was followed with anxious sympathy on the part of the faithful. The emperor of Austria was a conservative and deliberately vague in his dealings. He gave the pope no less trouble than the *illuministi* or "enlightened ones" of France.

On November 23, 1779, Mariangela gave birth to a baby girl, probably her last child.[2] Now forty, she had borne one child after the other according to the usual rhythm for married women of that era. She enjoyed excellent health and continued to be a woman ready to take the initiative. The newborn was called Maria Clementina. She lived for only a few weeks, however, and was buried in the parish church on January 17, 1781.

At the age of ten Francesco Albertini began his scholastic experience, attending catechism at the parish. The "eternal verities" would be learned through the rhythm of songs or complex theological formulas repeated in simple songs. Francesco gained knowledge, however, from more than just formal schooling. He received the basis for all learning at the breast of society and family, two resources that were absolutely homogeneous for him. In his case, they coincided with the Church, great mother and teacher.

It may appear strange to make this statement given the ambience of a place like the Piazza Montanara, where life too often took on features that were dramatic, common or downright obscene. Healthy families, however, were still in the majority, and could neutralize the worst aspects of society, making them appear marginal, which in fact they were, even if they were conspicuous.

[2] We say "probably" because there is a lacuna in the parish registers of San Nicola in Carcere. Missing are the records of baptisms from September 1783 until June 1810 and the "Status of Souls" from 1743 through 1825.

On careful reflection, one understands how the marginality of evil would highlight the goodness of the good. One might compare this to a painting of Caravaggio, in which the shadows render the light almost blinding.

For example, there were drunkards roaming about, good for nothings, but stigmatized as deviants. They actually served a positive purpose, warning the sober of the perils of alcohol abuse better than any abstract sermon. The same could be said of prostitution, of dishonesty and so on. On the other hand, sober folk, women without reproach even in their poverty, and hardworking, fiercely honest men presented the other side of the coin. Choice was a moral obligation. Society itself had its values and so was a teacher.

This is always true. The ideal would be that everyone would be sober, but it was worse to remain neutral, in the name of tolerance, since this would lead to abstaining from value judgments. It would be tantamount to saying that sobriety and drunkenness were equally valid. A woman, a man, a mother, a father, a child had to have, beyond the personality that made them individuals, a pattern of life that united them. The society that does not distinguish between good and evil needs to recover its values or it will go out of existence.

It is easy to say that this is impossible because of the subjective nature of values, so that the only value would be that of respecting diverse opinions, excluding none. Not all opinions are reconcilable with the common good, which is the aim of every society. For one who has faith, the common good is determined by community itself: that is to say, the interests of the family and of the one Father. It is no accident that the *illuministi* who were most blinded by the presumed "illumination" picked on the concept of family, looking to break up its foundations, contemptuously disrupting social relations.

Among the Mazzoneschis and thus in the Albertini home, values, beginning with the family, were strong, deeply rooted, absolute and always gentle. They were authoritative and not authoritarian. They were values of the parents, not of *padroni* or bosses. The enlarged model of the family in which they lived was of no less importance than its component parts. Salvatore and Domenico did not lord it over the others. They considered the children of their sister as their own and Antonio showed himself grateful to his in-laws, who had agreed that he make a position for himself. It was a beautiful example of Christian civility: no arguments, no scenes.

For Francesco the catechism class was an intellectual encounter with the fatherhood of God, whom he knew already in his daily life as the center of concentric circles that radiated to his uncles, to father and mother. He lived surrounded and rewarded by that love. It was easy to see that he was a happy boy, happy to remain in a certain sense an infant, by not having to leave his mother's arms, at least psychologically, and not letting go of the hand of his uncles and of his father who guided him on an equal footing.

Piazza Montanara was not only a marketplace and a theater. Everyone was talking about Fra Leonardo da Porto Maurizio, the great preacher who died there and was venerated by the people as a saint. His sayings and his sermons were still being quoted by the people. The friar from Imperia could call himself a Roman of Rome. He studied there from the age of twelve, at the Collegio Romano. He was a member of the evening oratory of Caravita and of the Oratory at the Chiesa Nuova. He was also a member of the sodality of the twelve apostles. He left Rome when he joined the Friars Minor, but returned to the city and lived there for many years, interrupted by some preaching or other, until his death in 1751. His body remains in Rome, in the church of San Bonaventura on the Palatine.

The Mazzoneschis had heard him preach on the occasion of the holy year of 1750, when he had erected a grand *Via Crucis* at the Coliseum. The Christian way of life must be lived according to the path marked by the life of Christ. "Come and follow me," Jesus said to those who asked him about what they should do. To all he indicated that this was a matter of following him while carrying the cross every day. The friar, with his colorful language, militaristic in this case, was accustomed to say that the Stations of the Cross are cannon shots and that the pious practice of these "stations" was "a battery against hell." When he preached them it was lethal for the devil, because even the most hardened sinners surrendered to grace.

Fra Leonardo spoke his mind and he got quite heated when speaking about social injustices. This was not a subversive populism, but neither did he adhere to a code of silence or helplessness. He would let forth a barrage when there was a matter of offensive inequality, such as cheating workers. He knew well that very often material misery resulted in moral misery. In these cases misery would be as dangerous as excessive riches, but it was less culpable. He preached the Gospel in its entirety, which did not deny prostitutes their dignity and often gave them precedence over the richly dressed and privileged.

Francesco planted and deepened his roots in this rich soil of authentic and robust morality. The example of the saint, who preached in order to call sinners to the path of goodness, made a permanent impression on him. "We are all responsible for the common good." The concepts of paternity and maternity are linked to love. Fathers or mothers who do not love their children would be called "unnatural," that is to say, not according to the order of nature. The same could be said of children who do not love father and mother.

We already know how life was lived in the Albertini home.

Despite their discrete affluence, they lived with a sobriety that involved and characterized every aspect of life: how they ate, what they wore, their furniture, even their speech. "If you don't know the value of money you don't deserve it," sensible persons used to say. Economic affluence was tempered by shrewd management of affairs. If you spend as much as you earn, you are always standing on the brink of misery.

The above-cited proverb was never understood by the Mazzoneschis in a miserly or stingy manner. First of all, they had no ambitions for power. Second, to know the value of money did not mean to go and bury it like the man in the parable. That was not the way to gain a return. They would appreciate something good when it was used for a good purpose, and in Francesco's family this meant either alms or a productive and wise investment in the household economy.

Francesco picked up the example of the family and lived it to the extreme. He began by giving what he had: first of all, his knowledge. From that he learned the pleasure of sharing. Sometimes he would give to the poor from that which would not have been appropriate for him to give. He would even give away his own food. He seemed to be a prisoner of charity. But he was never reproved. What gave him pleasure gave pleasure also to his family, who were convinced that "it is the bread that you give to another that truly satisfies your hunger; it is the clothing you provide for another that truly covers you."

Famous examples of such principles helped to serve as points of reference for the Mazzoneschi and Albertini families. There was Saint Gotthard, Saint Nicholas of Myra, Saint Leonard of Port Maurice, not to mention Veronica, who had received the image of Jesus on her veil, a favor for her having performed a single small act.

The first Christian formation of Francesco Albertini took

place, thus, in the kaleidoscopic context described in the preceding pages, as a kind of standard of self-giving. It was marked by the steps that were characteristic of Christian formation of the time: he was confirmed at eight, made his first confession and Communion at nine or ten, after having received the appropriate catechesis from the parish curate.

The child was especially sensitive to the basics of the catechism. He went beyond the dry formulas and methods and saw reflected and constructed in them the extreme simplicity of the spiritual life. He thought to himself: "These things are not disguised. Everything is known from the outset. Nothing more is needed than the docility of children. The norms themselves are the arms with which the Father enfolds and protects us. Sinners rebel against the Father, who has made his will known to them, but they remain his children and my brothers and sisters. Thus, just as the Father does everything to bring those children back, I must act in such a way as to bring them back as my sisters and brothers."

He was happy to perform acts that he knew, thanks to the Law, were God's will. He was not pleased that many did not know the joy that comes from docility. It went back to his infancy. He would lie in bed like a little tranquil lake, embraced by his mother. Now he began to feel like a river that runs through the world. He experienced the happiness of a river that runs within its bed, all the way to the sea. The banks are the arms that lead the river to the sea.

He noticed that many children his age either did not attend catechism classes or participated in them unwillingly and distractedly. He found that astonishing, since he considered that those classes were communicating truths important for eternal life. Everyone should have searched for them eagerly. He became most disconcerted in finding out that the priests assigned to the

task hardly gave it much thought. They should have carried out this ministry most energetically, as an obligation of their vocation and as a command of the Father.

At the age of ten or eleven he organized a kind of after-school program. When the classes in which he had participated were over, he gathered his companions, especially those who had skipped the class, in a spacious spot rented by his parents in the Vicolo della Bufala. With these friends he would pray in front of a little altar and repeat to them what they had learned just before. To make this gathering more pleasant and to attract more attendees, he would serve some sweets that his mother gladly made for this purpose. He had them spend an hour in entertainment, which in general would consist in a game of bocce.

Francesco was acting contrary to his own nature with these gatherings. When the encounters were over he withdrew into himself, entering again into a more domestic ambience. He was not attracted at all by the games of his classmates and even less by an ambition to be in command and to stand out. An interior dynamism showed up in him, a dynamism that resembled a river that sought no other course than its own, to make fertile and productive its banks. If someone wished to draw water from the current and to convey it to the fields to irrigate them, so be it; he would not say no.

He was very fond of prayer. Beside his mother or his uncle Domenico he would pass at least an hour a day on a bench in San Nicola in Carcere, each absorbed in meditation or engaged in reciting the Rosary. His father and mother were very happy with this and discussed his future, which, in truth, really required little discussion. It was evident that the boy had a vocation to the priesthood: a possibility that was anything but rare in some families of the day.

They recalled the strange sign that the boy presented on his head at the moment of his birth. If Francesco was not made for the priesthood, people said, then for what else?

Chapter 5
SCHOOL AND SOCIETY

Albertini's father was discussing matters with the friar at the Ara Coeli convent and his uncles, Domenico and Salvatore, were having conversations with the priests at San Nicola in Carcere. There was a general consensus: it was important that he study. He would flourish like a budding rose. Thus Francesco began his studies, with many expectations in light of his splendid record from the catechism course and from his sensible conduct in the family.

They were in for an unexpected and unpleasant surprise. The boy was not doing well! There was a decided plunge in his evaluation by the family and others. There were no extenuating circumstances which would have allowed them to say: "He needs to apply himself more. He's not studying enough. He's too involved in play." No, he applied himself body and soul, the poor boy, and even so, the results were just not there. There was no appealing the verdict. What a sad end to the promising start of this child prodigy!

In that era there was little debate about schools and their methods. They were hostile places, where one would go to learn some difficult concepts. There was little questioning of the methods employed. In a certain sense, the school functioned as a means of domesticating young people. Only two instruments were deemed effective: reward and punishment.

In classes the children were divided into two teams, sometimes called armies, highly motivated in opposing one another. Depending on the year of studies, the two opposing armies were the Trojans and the Greeks or the Romans and the Carthaginians. The usual method of instruction was to stir up

the competition, but competition in turn unleashed aggressive behavior. The focus on winning did not legitimize a low blow against the adversary, but it was still frequently used. That same aggressiveness came out against one's friends within the same army since they were fighting for the post of emperor, general, centurion or lieutenant. Such aggression could not help but harm the students.

All of this reflected life, unfortunately even that of the Church. Francesco's heart recoiled at methods like this. He came from the loving embrace of his parents, uncles and the parish community, and now he was thrown into a cold and hostile environment. He would have come to the aid of the enemy if he could, even at the price of losing. Throwing himself into the attack was as repugnant to him as frequenting those places of perdition that his family told him to avoid. School, therefore, was a revelation to that simple and innocent student as a place where one would be injected with a poison that would be toxic for one's life.

If asked to talk about his personal torment, he would not have been able to express it, but it was agonizing for him. Out of self-defense he distanced himself from the school and from everything that took place there. Given his grades, all believed him to be stupid. Good, for heaven's sake, but stupid.

His father, "despairing of throwing him back into that environment, ran out of ideas as he tried to think of some trade for him." He would certainly not make a good businessman. He lacked that spark of personal interest which would prompt him to be interested in what would be useful, in cultivating a clientele as a source of income. Antonio could have made him a good metal worker, as would his uncle Domenico, who was skilled in his work and devoted to it almost as if it were a religious vocation. But before Antonio could put this plan into action, he wanted, as was

his custom, to consult his spiritual director.

We do not know the name of the friar of the Ara Coeli convent. He would merit an honorable mention. Besides directing Antonio, he was Francesco's confessor. He knew what was happening in certain schools of the quarter and the vulgar way in which they were run. Since he was familiar with Francesco's nature, he guessed the problem. He told Antonio to find another school for Francesco. Why not take him to the school of the Scolopi Fathers, entrusting him to one of the religious there, so that he would look out for the boy? Francesco just needed a little attention to get going again.

The Scolopi were the leading lights of education. When their schools began, the teachers of the area had mounted a persecution against the founder, Saint Joseph Calasanzio, because he was taking away their students. They could not accept that the secret of a school was to make it a family. A student who had never experienced kindness in a school would experience it with them, and a student who came from a loving family would not feel that it was a punishment to spend a few hours a day in such a school.

Antonio Albertini went with his son to the school of the Scolopi, called Calasanzio Nuovo. It was not far away: near Santa Lucia dei Ginnasi and San Nicola dei Cesarini.[1] The building, begun in 1746, was not yet finished.

At the entrance there was a large image of the Madonna. As soon as Francesco saw it, he felt embraced by her arms. Aware of the anxiety that his situation was causing his father, he said: "Dad, let's kneel and pray to the Madonna. She will make me learn." Eventually the school also became a mother to him.

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[1] The school seems to have been on the Via delle Botteghe Oscure near the Largo Argentina. Neither church exists today. Santa Lucia was torn down to widen the Via delle Botteghe Oscure and San Nicola was removed during archeological excavations in the Largo Argentina.

Each time he went to school, he would say one Hail Mary after another, because the Madonna would help him to learn what was being taught. He had to make up for lost time and get the basics that he had not learned. He would go to school carrying his books on his head with a hat over the books. People who saw him would laugh, finding him strange. When someone told him to stop carrying books on his head and his hat over the books so that he would not make himself look so ridiculous, he would reply: "I want the content of the books to trickle down into my head…I don't care if I look ridiculous provided that I'm learning."

After a few months he turned out to be one of the leading students of Calasanzio Nuovo and once again became the young man of great promise around the Piazza Montanara, just as he had been when he was small. In the parish, "he was admired by all" because of his composure, the wisdom with which he worked with others at various functions, and his maturity.

He began to visit Santa Galla, a shelter for the poor, a kind of dormitory with an attached church, both heavily frequented.[2] In the evening, before retiring in the evening, the guests were led into the church for prayers and a reflection for the night. Once in bed, a priest would come by each person's bedside and give him or her a *baiocco*[3]: enough money to purchase food the following day. Many would spend it on wine, scraping together some food by begging. For the young Francesco it was a field of work in which he continued learning about human relationships.

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[2] Saint Gaspar was also involved in the ministry of Santa Galla, becoming president of the institution while still in the seminary. The building no longer exists, having been destroyed at the same time as the Piazza Montanara when the street was widened. The site is now occupied by the Anagrafe, the bureau of public records, on Via Petroselli.

[3] A unit of currency at one time equivalent to the British shilling. It disappeared with the adoption of the *lira* after the unification of Italy.

Poverty distressed Francesco. He, who had never experienced material need, appreciated the frugal life that he was accustomed to. "Imitating the great charity of his parents, he secretly gave alms to the poor and did not send away disconsolate anyone who turned to him in their need." His kindness toward those in need also helped to satisfy a hunger and thirst beyond the material.

"Having completed the course in humane letters," he acquired knowledge "of the Greek language" and established "a solid foundation for more serious studies" like philosophy and theology. His natural inclination, however, was toward the humanities, in which his spirit of observation and his strong romantic disposition were helpful. He liked to write poetry. The art of poetry gave him an appreciation of the effectiveness of mnemonics, of systems to aid the memory. Whatever truth could be put into easy rhymed verses would be engraved in the memory.

It was almost certainly his father who pushed him to seek admission to the Accademia Varj, part of the school of the Scolopi. Belonging to such associations was for the most part a fashion, a concession to vanity. Rome was full of academic institutions.

In practice, membership in an academy was practically obligatory for a student to be taken seriously. It was believed that a student who was not a member of an academy lacked ability.

Francesco was enrolled in December 1785 with this note: "We have learned, Signor Francesco Albertini, how your wisdom and intelligence have combined to give you a particular ability in the Humanities. By consensus of the Association, we believe it most appropriate to fulfill your desires to enroll in our Academy of Varj, established in the Collegio Nuovo Calasanzio."

More significant was the "enrollment" that took place on September 23 of the following year when he received the tonsure. With this rite, celebrated in the basilica of Saint John Lateran, he

was received into the clerical state. An external sign, the shaving of the hair in a circular pattern at the top of the head, witnessed that he belonged to the clergy. In the Papal States it had a special significance, for at the time the entire government bureaucracy was run by clerics.

According to the norms of the time, he would have been able to pursue his studies and marry or remain single. In the latter case, he would be permitted to proceed to the priesthood. Clerics who remained unmarried, unlike those who were married, had no limitations on their political or ecclesiastical careers. Even without becoming priests they could reach very high levels in the hierarchy and even become cardinals. Of course, once embarked on a clerical career, a great number went on to the priesthood. Through the centuries the Church had amassed a huge fortune consisting of both personal and real property. From this fortune were created benefices that were intended to assure the maintenance of every church, chapel or altar. In order to assure themselves of hefty incomes, the clerics would jostle and haggle, cultivating those with the power to increase their incomes and badmouthing their competitors. It was just like it had been in school.

Apart from this, a priest was an authority in himself. His status conferred on him privileges that were by no means minor. The priest curate was the most direct and incisive authority in daily life. The law gave him the mandate to keep an eye on the morals and religious practice of the faithful. Going well beyond the words of Saint Paul, the curate admonished, reproached, exhorted and, on occasion, even punished. He compiled the registers of baptisms, confirmations, marriages and deaths and issued certificates of good conduct that were truly and properly judicial sentences.

Francesco Albertini by his very nature aspired to a different life as a priest. The idea of obtaining an income, even if

it were needed to live, seemed to him to be a betrayal of his own authenticity. He was immersed in his intended ministry of leading people to the Father, who could be imagined as a father among his children or as a brother among brothers.

With such a frame of mind, on March 3, 1787, he received the orders of porter and lector in the Lateran Basilica. On September 22 of the same year the orders of exorcist and acolyte were conferred on him.[4]

At that time Johann Wolfgang Goethe[5] was touring Rome in search of romantic feelings and of love, both innocent and of the kind one pays for. As a Protestant, he defined the pope as "the greatest actor" of the city of Rome, without recognizing that he himself far surpassed the pope in this regard. Goethe spoke Italian, dressed as an Italian and, despite his fame as a writer and politician, was able to live under a false name. He called himself Philipp Moller, played a hundred parts as if an actor in a play, and even passed himself off with the ambassador of Naples to Rome as a certain Milleroff, on his way to Naples from Moscow.

The great German poet, however much he was disillusioned, daydreamed in Rome, intoxicated with its wonders. At every stone he would allow himself to be swept along in the flow of history and boundless emotion. He noted an obligation to make himself the missionary of a universal message. He wrote: "...I feel that I will not carry all these treasures along with me for my

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[4] The minor orders of acolyte, exorcist, lector and porter were once distinct offices or ministries in the Church, but over the centuries they came to be administered to clerics prior to their ordination to the major orders of subdeacon, deacon and priest. The 1983 Code of Canon Law eliminated the minor orders and introduced the ministries of acolyte and lector. In contrast to previous practice, the 1983 Code determined that admission to the clerical state comes with ordination to the diaconate and not with the tonsure.

[5] Goethe was a noted German Romantic author, most famous for his play *Faust*.

advantage alone and only for my private use, but rather that they might serve my entire life, to myself and others, as guide and goad. Yes, I have finally arrived in this capital of the world."

In the opening verses of the *Roman Elegies,* he stated the same things with greater emphasis:

Tell me you stones, O speak, you towering palaces!
Streets, say a word! Spirit of this place, are you dumb?
All things are alive in your sacred walls
Eternal Rome...
Indeed, you're a whole world, Rome...

And so the heart of the young Albertini, as he progressed in his studies, imbibed the grandeur of Rome. He could look upon the city with an emotion and wonder perhaps unknown to many Romans, thanks to the influence of his father, who had come to Rome from distant Intragna.

Francesco saw things differently from the brilliant author of *Faust*. Everything that ignited the fantasy of that German communicated a sense of transience to Francesco. He was, however, enthusiastic over the vestiges of Christianity, for the places where the martyrs were put to death, and for the famous relics of the life of Christ. Together these formed a great unity of faith and love. He needed to use such riches for his private use. He needed to make them of benefit to all of life for himself and for others. This was not some sort of ideal construct, but a life commitment to accomplish this "in his own flesh and in his own blood."

Goethe was producing poetry to leave to posterity that would captivate on a level with poetry created by the greatest poets of all time. They were fantasies, capable of moving people to give free rein to their imagination. They were sudden flights of fancy, capable of igniting some meaningless fireworks, but not capable of

setting one's life on fire (except, perhaps, in the moment of artistic creation). Albertini was seeking only to incarnate an Incarnation that would fill one's life with fire.

Chapter 6
AN INTERIOR REVOLUTION

Antonio Albertini had given the family business a significant change of direction. His was a classic case of movement that was taking place on a larger scale. The aristocracy was in decline, and the middle or "bourgeois" class was gaining ground. The bourgeoisie consisted of businessmen and those who were dealing in land. They were growing rich through the proceeds of their commerce or by using the land of the feudal landowners, which was leased mainly for raising livestock. The profits obtained allowed a rise in their social status and family alliances with the nobility.

Little by little the Mazzoneschi workshop was becoming a store. With his many connections, Antonio was able to get products from many different places in Italy, mainly from the city of Brescia. At first glance it was obvious that these were better goods, and the word spread quickly. At the shop of Antonio of Switzerland steel is steel and not tin! Hoes, spades and sickles went out to all the villages of the Comarca and in Campagna and Marittima,[1] as though carried along by a whirlwind. The orders did not stop, and this in turn required Antonio to place more orders for the goods. Things were going well, and in Intragna they were saying, with little exaggeration, that in Rome the Albertinis were making money by the shovelful.

The economy was sailing along with the wind at its back, and so were Francesco's studies. He had a taste for philosophy. A young man who was reflective beyond his years, he found in

[1] The Comarca referred to an area near Rome that was made up of the districts of Tivoli and Subiaco. Campagna and Marittima referred to the area south of Rome, comprising part of the modern region of Lazio and the region of Campania, the area around Naples.

the theses of that many-branched discipline an ample field for his intense personal activity. Metaphysics, logic, and especially the Socratic method, fascinated him. He knew how to take this speculative material that he was studying and bring it down to earth in conversation.

The spirituality of Francesco brought together three saints with the name of Francesco or Francis: Francis of Paola, from his family; Francis of Assisi, especially because of his frequent visits to the Franciscan friars of Ara Coeli and Saint Bonaventure; and finally Francis de Sales, thanks to the latter's spiritual writings which he came across by chance.

This was an event of great importance to Albertini the cleric. He was captivated by the flowing language and refined wisdom of de Sales that was at the same time accessible to everyone. He was also captivated by the ideal human person that derived from those pleasant readings. The *Philothea*[2] seemed to him to be a mine, a sort of *summa* of the spiritual life. He planned to acquire competence in language, a simple style, but above all to embody that type of personality that ends up being the first and best argument in favor of the Gospel.

At the age of eighteen he gave, *summa cum laude,* a public oral essay (*un saggio pubblico*), a brilliant conclusion to his attendance at the school of the Scolopi.

At the time philosophy was considered the *ancilla theologiae* or the "handmaiden of theology." For his theological

[2] The reference is to one of the best-known works of de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life,* which is written as a series of instructions to one Philothea, "one who loves God." This work also became very influential in the spiritual life of St. Gaspar.

studies Francesco went on to the Dominican College of Saint Thomas, at Santa Maria sopra Minerva.[3]

One would say that the mind of Francesco Albertini did not cease to surprise. Who said that one could predict the day from the dawn? How many days begin with the din of a thunderstorm and then celebrate the triumph of the sun and of quiet! And how many geniuses were mediocre in their required studies? Such was the scholastic curriculum of Francesco Albertini. Now that he had resolved his conflicts with the scholastic methods, arriving at last at the study of God, he became a giant, no longer in the field of pure speculation, but in the possession of the truth.

How many theologians treat God as a mere object: as if God were the sun? No theologian would say that God is like an object of the physical universe, but many study the composition, function, and effects of God. They do not have a personal relationship with God. It is simply a problem of knowledge. It is a delusion to believe that one can control an entity whom one should allow to control him/her. It was not like that for Francesco, because for him God was the Father who absorbed and distilled the love of father and mother. The young man always felt embraced by Him. The complementary scholastic subjects led to the same result: all were reflections of God, of the Father.

He began his course of studies in theology without a problem and with genuine profit, also finding the time to dedicate himself to canon and civil law, specializing in the study of inscriptions (*Lapidaria*) and in many other useful fields of

[3] The church and convent of Santa Maria sopra Minerva is located about a block from the Pantheon. The College of Saint Thomas, a Dominican institution, eventually was relocated and is more commonly known as the *Angelicum*, one of the theological faculties of Rome. By way of historical footnote, it was for many years the seat of the Congregation of the Holy Office, and Galileo's trial was conducted there.

knowledge. The study of inscriptions, for example, helped him to immerse himself in the continuity of history and to enter into direct contact with the Christian testimonies inscribed in the marble of the catacombs, the early Christian churches, and the tombs of the martyrs.

His journey into the culture of the time was in a certain sense predictable and was characterized by a progressively fruitful engagement in pastoral activities, partly as a result of contact with houses of the Franciscans who took him in. He could be found often at Santa Galla. To that institute of welfare "he turned all his thoughts and feelings. Always ready to offer himself for the benefit of the poor" who lived there, "he taught them Christian doctrine, prepared them to receive the holy sacraments, counseled them, admonished them, corrected them , and encouraged them to bear their miseries with patience and, having become as if one of them, appeared not to know how to detach himself from them."

Of course, he was a constant presence in the parish church. The priestly and confident figure of the cleric Francesco in the functions of the church gave the Albertini and Mazzoneschi families an undoubted prestige. All were captivated by his presence, his complete availability and humility. The popular opinion was that this was more than a good young man. He was a saint.

He went to school with a friend, a young man who, although dressed as a cleric, sought the latest in ecclesiastical fashions. Pomaded and perfumed, he would strut before an imagined audience. Albertini wanted very much to moderate this companion's vanity. He would joke with him or would instruct him in a witty manner.

One day he said to him: "We should be followers of Jesus, who had only one set of clothes and one concern: souls!"

"But the Church keeps many kinds of clothing articles.

It has established a precise and varied wardrobe: stockings, mozzettas, buckles, miters, ermines…"

"Well, the Church is one thing, and the people of the Church are another. Dressed like that, to me you look like one of those crucifixes that stand in the antechambers of the cardinals!"

He was referring to certain crucifixes, resplendent in gilding with damask backgrounds, which one would see in the apartments of prelates. They were poor mannequins, resplendent only with worldliness. He would prefer a Christ who was rough, bruised, wounded and bleeding. These were indeed part of the great desolation and of the true nature of that day on Calvary!

Some have described the young Albertini as too concerned with exterior cleanliness and decorum in his dress. We believe that it was a matter of simple cleanliness and decorum. It was surely thanks to his mother, Mariangela, and perhaps even more his sister, Elisabetta, who by now had become a beautiful young woman of eighteen. Francesco cared little for himself, as we will see when he goes off to live on his own. He was on the way to a progressive self-forgetfulness, like those great artists who are absorbed in their art. It was not a matter of dressing in tatters. He continued to repeat: "The cleric should have only one set of clothes, like Jesus."

After receiving the subdiaconate on June 18, 1791 and the diaconate on September 22, 1792, he prepared for ordination to the priesthood "with many exercises of piety and Christian mortification." The times were difficult and there were new threats to the Church. The French Revolution was making its influence felt and soon the clouds would come over Saint Peter's.

The solid economic position of the Albertinis can be seen in the marriage preparations for Elisabetta. In 1792 her parents finalized marriage arrangements with Biagio Baccigalupi, who asked for the hand of the young woman for his son Giuseppe.

The dowry property that she would be taking with her was listed in some detail. It amounted to about 700 scudi: 240 in precious objects and the rest in clothing.[4]

The list of her possessions contained many and varied items of apparel of high quality. What a difference between the trousseau of Elisabetta and the single garment worn by Francesco in imitation of Christ! Francesco's simplicity was also in stark contrast to the clothing of many clerics of the day.

All priests, in a certain sense, followed the principle of a single garment because each day they would put on a garment of the same style and color. In practice, however, one would see how a great variety in the apparent uniformity of style could be contrived. The quality of the cloth, the precious buttons and buckles, the refinement of the stockings, the type and shine of the shoes, not to mention the undergarments, which could be seen at the wrist and neck, all revealed a luxury that was out of control. The trousseaus of some clerics were no less rich and varied than the trousseau of Elisabetta Albertini. Don Francesco interpreted the principle of a single garment in a radical sense. The one who lives in the presence of God must achieve an interior beauty, must change, that is, be converted, and not try to hide oneself by dressing in elaborate clothing to appear somehow different than one is.

Nevertheless he did not disapprove of the preparations of his family for the wedding of his sister. According to Saint Paul, the man of God must please only the Lord; those who are married, on the other hand, must be occupied with the things of the world and how to please the husband or the wife. Francesco knew this well. Accepting these or even providing them was part of fatherhood.

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[4] The *scudo* was a basic unit of currency in the Papal States as well as in other parts of Italy. It appears that it was more or less equivalent in value to the dollar of the day.

He had often been involved in obtaining a decent dowry for poor young women so that they could get married without shame.

For whatever reason, the marriage of his sister did not take place at that time. This probably did not cause her any great trauma. In those days one loved the person whom one was obligated to love. Families contracted the marriage. In cases like that of Elisabetta, people sometimes raised suspicions regarding the possible causes of the breakup. In general they suspected some sort of shameful activity on the part of the woman. That could not be the case with Elisabetta, a young woman of the most irreproachable character. Perhaps in her case there arose some reservation on the part of the intended spouse.

The French Revolution had carried the ideas of the Enlightenment to a radical level. The Revolution revealed an irremediable contradiction between its ideas and actual practices. The Enlightenment deified abstract reason and trusted in the resources of an abstract humanity. As a practical matter, and especially in the field of sociology, there were, more than reasons, opinions that were considered dogma by those who held them. Humanity (*L'Uomo*) was to be found in concrete ways in a multiplicity of human beings who were in disagreement among themselves, who were tough and fundamentalist. "Reason" resorted to asserting itself through the familiar expedient of brute force. The force of reason was simply raw force, and the result was violence without equal in history, causing rivers of blood to flow, something that was the boast of the Terror.[5] From this state of affairs, members of religious orders in general and former Jesuits in particular came to believe that God, abandoned by humanity, had abandoned humanity to itself as its own worst enemy.

Nevertheless, the new ideas held a fascination and made

[5] The Terror is the name given to the bloodiest period of the French Revolution, 1793-1795, when the Committee of Public Safety sent thousands to the guillotine.

inroads among the most cultivated youth. There was some good in this, they would say. But the young people did not distinguish the good from the bad. Sometimes it even appeared that they would choose evil under the pretext of good. The bonds that had held society together were showing signs of coming apart. Something had happened even among clerics, resulting in a critical attitude toward an ostentatious and triumphalist Church. Most (like the main figures of the Enlightenment) spouted high-sounding language about society in order to gain new privileges, preserving what could be saved of the old. The better among the clergy challenged some features and aimed at correcting them.

Even Francesco Albertini had some points of protest. However, we should not lump these together with the novel ideas of the Enlightenment. Francesco's source was solely the Gospel, and where he did not see it being applied, he took extreme measures. He attended classes with a simple naturalness. It was a good-natured message for the students who came to school with an even more ridiculous haughtiness. They were already playing the part of a cardinal.

On January 11, 1793, the forty-year old Baron Nicolas Jean Hugou de Bassville, accompanied by Major Charles de Flotte, presented himself to Secretary of State Cardinal Francesco Saverio de Zelada, to order the raising of the French Republic flag above the door of his palace and that of the French Academy within twenty-four hours. The French diplomat had been named consul not long before, and his zeal was as encompassing as it was unjust. It was tantamount to recognizing the French Republic on the part of the pope. An institution founded on divine revelation could not accept the principles of the Enlightenment, especially in the matter of the basis of authority. How could the pope agree to the many violations of the rights of the Church in France?

Faced with the pope's refusal and urged on by Charles

de Flotte, who had become arrogant due to the presence of the French fleet along the coast of Lazio and by the excitement caused by the agents provocateurs who had infiltrated the populace, Bassville had the coats of arms erected by force. This was throwing down the gauntlet to the Church itself, beyond any affront to the States of the Church.[6] The new France asserted its own right to dictate laws to the world in the name of a reason that did not listen to reason. Not content with this, the consul and his adjutant presented themselves in the Sunday *passeggiata* on the Corso wearing the bright tricolor cockade. The three colors were green, white and black. Bassville and de Flotte made a show as they rode on a carriage which bore, in place of its headlamps, the tricolor pennants, as if they were the new lights destined to save the way of progress.

It was a violation of national sovereignty. The act inflamed the people. A crowd surrounded the carriage and grew more hostile. Their anger surged out of control near San Lorenzo in Lucina. The crowd hurled itself against the carriage, and de Flotte fired his pistol. It is not known if it was a warning shot, or if it was fired into the crowd. Opinion at the time was immediately divided. The coachman, sensing the danger, spurred on the horses

[6] It is important to note that for centuries Italy was not a unified country, but rather a collection of various states. The pope was a temporal ruler of a large section of central Italy, generally known in English as the "Papal States." In the early nineteenth century, a movement generally known as the *risorgimento* or "resurgence" pressed for the unification of Italy under a single sovereign. This was finally accomplished in 1870 with the fall of Rome to an Italian army and the confiscation of most of the territory of the Papal States. The pope at the time, Pius IX, declared himself to be the "prisoner of the Vatican" as a protest to what he considered an unlawful act. The situation was resolved only in 1929 when Pius XI signed a concordat with the Italian state under Mussolini. The pope was allowed to keep some property in return for compensation, and the civil state of Vatican City was established.

and drove them to take refuge in the courtyard of the banker Luigi Moutte. The crowd that had followed the carriage surged into the courtyard unimpeded and surrounded the provocateurs again.

In the commotion one of the crowd, whose identity was never known, plunged a dagger into the abdomen of Bassville, mortally wounding the consul. At the sight of the diplomat, now growing limp in a pool of blood, the commotion abated, and soon the crowd dispersed.

Some believed that the assassination of the unfortunate Bassville was the work of the French government, to provide a convenient pretext to pressure the Holy See.

The pope sent a surgeon, who unfortunately could not do anything. Hugo de Bassville died on the evening of January 14, "moaning only that he had been the victim of a crazy man," but he was also a victim of the arrogance of his own government, at least in the opinion of the pope. In any case, it was reported that the consul received the sacraments with great fervor, repenting of the oaths he had made to the Republic of France and of violating the laws of the Church.

Pius VI hastened to take all the measures necessary to restore calm and expressed to the French government his regrets and asserting his own lack of involvement in the events. "In the meantime Bassville's wife, along with their son, and with the instigator of the first disturbance, de Flotte, saved from the fury of the people by the soldiers, were made to leave for Naples that same night and were given seventy scudi by the Pope for the journey since they did not have the money. Thus foreseeing… that the enemies of Rome would have altered and distorted the truth…Pius VI, not yet satisfied with what he had already done, in order to guide his people back to calm, seeing as they had fallen, as he said, to an attack contrary to the principles of Religion, of justice and humanity, had published an edict, in which he strongly

condemned the excesses committed as unworthy of a nation which ought to glory in being brought up with the dictates of moderation."

It is clear that nothing would placate the anger of those who were so indignant. Because revolutionary France threatened reprisals, the Pope viewed himself as compelled to reinforce the army and, as a consequence, to raise taxes to finance this. Money in the Papal States was "represented" by an incredible quantity of scrip. Genuine money in gold, silver or copper had become scarce, and whoever wanted to convert scrip into "real money" would have to accept a very high discount, as high as fifty per cent of the nominal value, and with the exchange in copper coinage. The pontifical government was forced to coin new money "with the old silver of the churches, and from private sources that were loaned by the Chamber to reduce in part the great quantity of scrip that was practically useless and to restore some ease in making small commercial transactions."

This plan did not succeed, because even the money coined fell prey to hoarders, although the new coins had been made of shoddy alloy, precisely to discourage the hoarders. The value of the coinage was so low as to fall below the value of the metal of which it was made. Only small change in copper was in circulation—and not always.

It was of little use that the Papal States sold some property. For example, Albano was acquired by the Prince of Piombino for 300,000 scudi. Two banks, Santo Spirito and Monte della Pietà, were put up for auction. The treasury did not receive great relief from this, since the gain was swallowed up by the reimbursements to those who held the scrip. The state lost its possessions without creating any reserve, but only the hoped- for bolstering of the current coinage and of the scrip that remained. The disbursements of the state were swallowed by a bottomless chasm.

The economic stagnation and the devaluation produced no little damage to the business of the Albertinis. Commercial activity involves payments for merchandise that are based on a stable valuation of the currency. They did not know how they would pay for the orders. Those who were to ship the merchandise were reluctant to do so, and those who were ordering it did not know how to guarantee the exchange value. The capital accumulated over years of business suddenly became practically worthless.

This was how things stood when Don Francesco was ordained a priest. He completed the required spiritual exercises at the retreat house of San Bonaventura on the Palatine Hill, where the body of St. Leonard of Port Maurice is buried.[7] It was an important witness for the one who was preparing himself to become a priest.

To establish "justice" among men and women the French Revolution committed injustices. In the name of "fraternity" blood was being shed. One needed to turn to the one Father, to follow the Son who had become the brother of all, and entrust oneself to the renewing Spirit. This was the true revolution to be unleashed in society. To accomplish this revolution, one had to incarnate the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of the Son, and leave the way open to the Spirit.

Don Francesco was ordained a priest on May 25, 1793, with a dispensation for the defect of age.[8] It was a day of jubilation for the family and of "special fervor" for him. He committed himself to grow in zeal, in interior passion, just as iron grows hotter in the fire.

[7] St. Leonard of Port Maurice was a noted Franciscan preacher of missions during the seventeenth century. In addition to preaching, he also left behind some widely read spiritual writings, among which was a diary of his missions. St. Leonard was also an inspiration to St. Gaspar and is mentioned in his letters.

[8] The "canonical age" or lower limit for ordination to the priesthood was and still is 25. A dispensation is needed for the ordination of one younger than this.

He knew very well how certain things could go. One prepares himself for the celebration of the Mass with desire and the first Mass is celebrated with passion, but later the fervor dissipates, even to the point of detachment. He knew the cause of this. The bellows had to be functioning or otherwise not only would the iron grow cold, but so would the embers that heated it. The bellows was prayer, which put one in communication with God and with his Spirit, the wind that moves all things. Prayer demands humility. Praying is placing oneself in the presence of God. "Who is God and who am I?" That's the point. "I am a piece of coal," Don Francesco would respond. "By myself I am not able to catch fire nor, when lit, can I remain just an ember."

Chapter 7
FAMILY REORGANIZATION

In November of 1793, the de-Christianization of France reached its climax. All churches were closed. Those in Paris were dedicated to Reason, which was divinized in December. A nude dancer was solemnly installed on the altar of Notre Dame. The king and queen were executed, and France now entrusted itself to a Committee of Public Safety. A new draft added 300,000 soldiers to the army. The French army began to annex and to threaten hostile nations. On June 8 of the following year, the feast of the Supreme Being was established as a ruse for not admitting to total atheism. Meanwhile, the Terror was growing in a tragic rhythm until its high point, which began on June 10, 1794, as a "gift" of the Supreme Being. In judicial proceedings, the right to defense and even the interrogation of the accused were abolished as manifestations of weakness. A human being was worth less than a fly. The tribunal could make judgments based on simple suspicions, and the only sentence envisioned was death.

The worst aspects of the Terror had arrived, but the future brought some movement toward moderation. In May 1795 the churches were restored to worship, and the revolutionary tribunal was suppressed. But the pendulum had just begun to swing back. The tensions remained very strong and the outcome very uncertain.

Meanwhile in Rome, Don Francesco had rented a house near the Consolation Hospital.[1] He lived there with a servant, leading a very frugal life. He was convinced that a priest had to be

[1] The Ospedale della Consolazione was a functioning hospital at the time, and the building still exists today, although no longer used as a hospital. It is located about a block from San Nicola in Carcere. St. Gaspar visited the sick at the hospital, following the example of St. Aloysius who ministered to the victims of cholera there.

independent of his family so that his ministry would not appear to be dependent or that the faithful would have more limited access to him. He was right. The new house immediately became a haven frequented by all, without hesitation: a true home for clerics and people alike.

Snuff was very much in vogue at the time. It was judged to be an effective remedy for various illnesses, especially for headaches, and it was widely recommended and used. Don Francesco used it and was generous with his confreres and with those who came to his house, and he had a number of tobacco holders on the tables. Expenditure for snuff was a considerable expense in his budget. Some would come to see him perhaps only to take a pinch and then stayed, "led by the nose" by a captivating spiritual master.

He continued the initiative he had begun in his adolescence, organizing conferences on ascetic, moral, and theological themes for the benefit of his colleagues. Those who participated said that they had done so "with great pleasure and profit." "His conduct in such conferences was very worthy of admiration." It was a notable characteristic of his personality until his death.

Don Francesco would always seek to remain in the background. He had others speak, and when it was his turn to say something, he would immediately allow another to speak, as soon as he realized that he or she was able to carry the conversation along. It was a truly admirable method. The head, the organizer, behaved as if he were the least of the group.

When he was not able to avoid presiding over a gathering that he himself had called together, Don Francesco would carry out his duty with an affecting candor. "Always moderate in speaking, modest in expressing his opinion, ready to accommodate himself as much as he could to the opinion of others, easy in giving

others a chance to speak, one never saw him lose that spiritual equilibrium that accompanied him in all his actions. Above all he attempted to hide his talents in such a way that he would appear to be the least among all."

He found emotional energy in the joy of living for others. As he was and would continue to be an affectionate and docile son, not ashamed to say "mama" or "dearest mother," so he had taken to calling those who came to him for temporal or spiritual needs "son" or "daughter." One could readily see that this was not an affectation. It was an authentic and uninhibited warmth. The priesthood had made him a father, and fatherhood would be the charism most apparent during his life.

His affectionate nature sprang from his humility. Don Francesco had taken note that the ecclesiastics, as they rose up the hierarchical ladder, would grow in pride, either in the way they dressed or in their behavior. Prelates, nominally elevated to the office for service, would become inaccessible, surrounded by a retinue of servants in livery. It was a horrible practice. To rest even in the arms of God, one needs to be lightweight. Francesco was a feather: he was a nobody, always concerned with exploring more and more his own nothingness.

Like the ancient sages, he was certain above all of that which he did not know. He devoted himself to ongoing learning. As the psalm says, he was as "a thirsty deer" that longed "for the running streams," for those genuine and grand streams from which flowed the river of Christian knowledge: the Sacred Scriptures, the Fathers, the Scholastics, the great spiritual writers. Never satisfied in his quest to learn, convinced that no one could give what one did not have, he frequented study conferences that were held in Rome in the evening. He dedicated himself to reading the mystics and in particular to studying Saint Francis de Sales.

As happens in cases like his, true modesty accompanied by

undeniable personal worth obtained the opposite effect than what was planned, conferring on him a human greatness.

Young in years but learned and very wise, Don Francesco was sought out for counsel by persons of every level of society. The wiser among the authorities had their eye on him, considering him to be a valuable pawn. With his badly trimmed beard, he sometimes would appear to be a Socrates reborn, capable of bringing out the best in each person.

Nevertheless, the months went by and still he did not present himself for the examination required to hear confessions.[2] One could have thought that it was a matter of his neglecting his duties or of a lack of preparation. He, however, considered himself unworthy. It was enough for him to prepare a person spiritually, and then he would entrust the patient to the ministry of another priest. He was happy to make the referral, because implicit in his decision was the recognition that another would have done better. But he was like Jesus, who said to the lepers after having prepared them: "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And they were healed, certainly not because of the merit of the priests.

What Don Francesco had succeeded in making of himself came at a price. One penitent, in making his bed, had observed "on many occasions his shirts and sheets all soaked in blood." When the penitent mentioned this to family members, they responded by noting that this was the result of "great penance with the discipline and the haircloth."[3]

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[2] A priest does not have the right to absolve sins by virtue of his ordination alone. The faculty for hearing confessions must be granted by the local bishop, who is to ascertain that the priest possesses the required knowledge and skills for this ministry. In the past, this was determined by an examination, but today it is generally presumed that a man who has completed seminary training and is presented for ordination would be competent to hear confessions.

[3] A discipline is a small whip used as a penitential practice, as was the wearing of a hair shirt, a rough fabric that causes irritation.

Mariangela continued to be strong-willed and energetic. Antonio, on the other hand, was never well after the first Mass of his son. The infirmity of old age grew worse, and the good man passed all the rest of his days in bed or seated in a chair.

When he became aware of the first symptoms of illness, Antonio had thought to call his cousin Giovanni Battista and Giacomo Antonio Madonna. The two had moved from Intragna along with their respective families, full of hope and attracted by the moderate success enjoyed by their relative and fellow townsman. They intended to expand the business.

Giacomo Madonna had married Anna Liberata Bellani in the parish church of Intragna on September 8, 1776. Giovanni Battista Albertini, more or less the same age, had married, as already mentioned, Maria Domenica Tecla Maggetti, who gave birth on July 6, 1773 to a little girl name Anna Lucia Teresa. Giacomo Madonna and Giovanni Battista Albertini would take on Antonio's business as part owners.

The decision meant that Mariangela was no longer able to direct the large and diversified business. She also had to take care of her ailing husband. But she remained the owner of the business. The change meant that the business would have to support three families. Could that be possible?

Don Francesco was often at the sickbed of his father, comforting him with edifying discourses on Christian resignation. He never left the house without greeting him and kissing his hand. From time to time the friars from Ara Coeli would come down to hear his confession. Antonio died on January 26, 1795, after having received Viaticum and anointing. Don Francesco had completed his degree in theology just five days earlier.

Antonio Albertini was buried in the church of the Ara Coeli according to his wishes. Even though expected, his death was a grave loss for his son. This was evident in the funeral Mass which

Don Francesco celebrated even though he knew that tears would punctuate his words.

Two weeks later, Elisabetta became the wife of Signor Nicola Pitorri, nephew of one of the canons of San Nicola in Carcere. An unfavorable destiny seemed to weigh on the young woman. Her first marriage was called off at the last moment, and the second nearly at the same point because of her father's death. Her first experience advised against a new delay. The ceremony was a modest rite. In those days, the celebration of a marriage that had been arranged was an act of no particular solemnity. Even in normal situations there was no great feast. One would go to the church, often with other couples, and afterward everyone went back to work as on any other day.

Nicola Pitorri was from the parish of San Lorenzo in Damaso. The marriage was certainly favored by Don Francesco Maria Pitorri, canon of San Nicola in Carcere, who presided at the marriage on February 8, 1795, with two priests as witnesses: Don Luigi De Rossi, archpriest of Santa Maria in Cosmedin, and Don Giovanni Selvaggi. In the record of the marriage Elisabetta was described as "an honest girl," which, even in its radical sobriety, sounded like something of a tribute to the modesty of the young woman, since it was not a customary annotation.

Elizabeth's marriage brought on a reorganization of the family economy. Francesco enjoyed his own inheritance, established for him by his father on the occasion of his ordination. It is probably in such a situation that the Albertinis or the Mazzoneschis, in the person of Mariangela Mazzoneschi, widow Albertini, decided to assure themselves of income from part of the business activity. They relinquished the administration of the business, as mentioned before, to the new immigrants from Intragna.

The political problems had shattered economic growth.

The receipts were less, the money devaluated, and the domestic and international uncertainties did not bode well for the future. In addition, Don Francesco was not a careerist priest. He did not aim at obtaining a position with a big income. He appeared to live as if money were not needed in life.

The merchandise coming to the business continued to list Mariangela as its head. The containers were marked with the letters EAA, which stood for "Heirs of Antonio Albertini" (*Eredi Antonio Albertini*). Mariangela was replaced by her brother Domenico in handling the affairs, and he also took care of the inheritance of Don Francesco. The participation of the three parties (Mariangela Mazzoneschi, Giovanni Battista Albertini and Giacomo Madonna) in the company is clear. It seems certain that Don Francesco did not have any part in it and lived by his own income.

The personal property of Don Francesco came from a draft contract, prepared by Domenico. In it we read that, "as son and heir of the late Antonio, he wishes to rent out the shop used for sharpening (*la bottega di arrotatore*) in the Rione di Ripa, located in the Piazza Montanara across from the Vigolo della Bufala, in the apartment house of the Reverend Fathers of Jesus and Mary on the Corso."[4] The property to be rented also included the tools used for grinding and sharpening. The rent was to be 50 scudi annually, beginning in July 1795. Don Francesco also rented out a storeroom and some tools and a cellar in which to store food.

The family business continued with its usual activity. They sold finished products, mostly imported, and there was a workshop where repairs or miscellaneous original items were made. The greater part of the merchandise came from places that were at some distance: Civitavecchia, Brescia, Naples, and Pesaro.

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[4] They are commonly known as the Eudists.

One supplier sent 500 pruning hooks in a shipment. These details give us an idea of the wide range of activity of the Albertini business.

Chapter 8
ONE REPUBLIC, OR RATHER TWO

The anger of revolutionary France, entrusted to the Directory,[1] gradually became more violent and led to armed "republicans" spreading throughout Europe. The Italian front was entrusted to Napoleon Bonaparte, a very young and brilliant warrior, who aroused admiration and great enthusiasm. Having defeated the imperial forces in the north of Italy, he could have conquered the Papal States in the blink of an eye, but he did not do so, yet without saying that he did not wish to do so. Pius VI, for his part, was convinced that the French army was planning to attack the Papal States, and remained anxious, alternately confident and despairing according to how military operations were going.

The Directory wanted to conquer Rome to extinguish, according to the revolutionary slogan, "the flame of fanaticism, to smash the throne of stupidity and elevate the vessel of liberty on the Capitoline." Instead, Napoleon preferred an armistice. He understood that the continental front was more important in the immediate future. Also, it was his opinion that showing consideration for religion would be of help in the projects that he was planning.

The papal government and the government of France thus entered into an armistice from a war that had never begun, but that was already lost by the pope, since if he had attempted to fight the struggle would have been futile. The conditions: "Twenty-one million lire, equivalent to 15 million francs, 500 valuable manuscripts from the Vatican Library, and a hundred works of

[1] From 1795-1799 the executive power in France was held by five directors, generally referred to as the "Directory" or "Directorate."

art, both paintings and sculpture, including the bust of Junius Brutus in bronze, that of Marcus Brutus in marble, both from the Campidoglio. The two Brutuses … were the prototypes of the new French republic."

Napoleon wanted to be known as the one who aspired to be "the savior of the Holy See rather than its destroyer." For this reason he did not lose the opportunity to distinguish himself from his own government. While he was content to send the great wealth he had captured to Paris, he kept his distance, ignoring their directives and preparing to rid himself of them.

Before honoring the conditions of the armistice, Pius VI awaited the outcome of military operations with the hope – and it was useless to hide it – that Napoleon and France would be defeated. But this did not happen. The general seemed inspired, and the winds of history were blowing in his favor.

Not a few awaited a sign from above. The longing for extraordinary occurrences sometimes produces the conviction that they actually have taken place or are taking place. Voices began to speak from sacred images that opened and closed their eyes, sweated or suddenly appeared out of nowhere. Pius VI, moved by such prodigies, sought to stir up greater fervor in the people and urge them to a sincere reconciliation with God, as well as with the Church. He ordered missions to be held in six of the principal piazzas of Rome along with public processions in various sites for three consecutive days. At some of these "were seen more than 40,000 persons of every class and condition."

Don Francesco Albertini participated in the initiative with great enthusiasm. It was an opportunity to ascertain how great a resource the solemn preaching of the Gospel would be. The preachers captivated the crowds. But this was not Albertini's forte, whether because of his congenital shyness or because of some ascetical choice. While he was convinced of the need

for conversion and of the conferences, he would never mount a platform to preach. That role demanded theatrical gifts and an inclination to be at the center of attention. Persuasive personal discourse, not emphatic oratory, was his secret. Such personal conversation was also necessary in the missions. It was indispensable, since forceful oratory either draws one to the confessional and to deep reflection or ends up being as ephemeral as straw in the wind.

The popular fervor did not please the French, who were inclined to see in it "measures launched by the Pontifical Government to stir up the people and induce them by this means to massacre the French Commissioners, who are at this moment expected in Rome in order to collect the first installment of the payment agreed upon in the armistice." But it was entirely hyperbole. Pius VI was still awaiting the defeat of France, and no one could sway his belief. Until such an event occurred, however, he was obliged to adhere scrupulously to the terms agreed on and he was not so naive as to hope that the payment could be avoided by singing in processions.

In fact, through a very strict edict signed by Cardinal de Zelada, he informed the public "that some French Commissioners are about to reach Rome in order to take care of various matters that have been agreed to and he ordered "under the most severe penalty, that all give the fullest respect to any individual from that Nation." The first installment was put together thanks to a loan negotiated by Giovanni Torlonia.[2]

The Directory was not content with economic contributions. They wanted an ideological vassalage. Now they were demanding that the pope retract the condemnation of

[2] Giovanni Torlonia (1755-1829) was a very influential banker to the Papal States. The Torlonia family still owns several significant properties in Rome, and one of Giovanni's descendants holds the hereditary title of Prince Assistant to the Papal Throne.

the Civil Constitution of the Clergy of France, and they even furnished a formula for the retraction. They insisted that there would be no peace without such vassalage. With the support of the cardinals, Pius VI replied that he would prefer martyrdom rather than subjugate the interests of the Church to a political power dominated by ideologies contrary to the faith. In this appalling situation, the pope found a moral greatness that he did not have during a period of prosperity.

After a failed attempt in Florence to reach an agreement on some points not specified by the Constitution, the confrontation remained grave. Meanwhile, if peace had not actually been concluded, then payment of the levy would not be considered binding. The pope stopped the installment payment. This was the only, immediate, and very temporary advantage in the whole affair.

But on February 19, 1797, Pius VI was forced to agree to the peace treaty of Tolentino, which made the conditions of the armistice of Bologna even worse. The treaty added the renunciation of Ancona, Avignon, the county of Venassino and the payment of another 15 million francs. It was a relentless bloodletting.

Pius VI accepted the treaty just to keep the see of Rome. But the French *agents provocateurs* were working for the opposite solution. On December 28, 1797, there occurred a sort of replay of the Bassville case. This time the victim was Mathie-Léonard Duphot, the young general who was a "guest" of the embassy of France in Rome.

A squad of aspiring revolutionaries, led by the sculptor Giuseppe Ceracchi, presented themselves at the Palazzo Corsini, seeking the aid of the French ambassador for an insurrection. Papal troops showed up suddenly alongside them. Giuseppe Bonaparte, elder brother of Napoleon and the French ambassador to Rome, came forward to invite the soldiers to move out,

maintaining that they had gone beyond their jurisdiction. As the papal troops withdrew the rebels mounted an assault. The papal troops fired on their assailants, and some were wounded. General Duphot drew his sword and rushed toward the troops, perhaps in order to keep them from reloading. The troops withdrew.

Duphot, followed by the French and some common folk, headed for the Porta Settimiana. A papal picket was stationed there and had orders to let no one pass. He ordered them to halt. Duphot, still with sword drawn, advanced fearlessly and boldly. The sentry fired. The general fell to the ground and died.

It seems that the crisis was handled very badly on the part of the papal authorities. The pope was old and sick. The responsibility for dealing with the consequences of the incident fell to the Secretary of State, Cardinal Giuseppe Doria Pamphili, who at first kept himself aloof. He should have known, however, that the Directory was not waiting for something else.

When he realized this, he went to the opposite extreme, exhibiting a rather nauseating passivity. He said, in substance, that the Directory would be able to request the reparation that they wanted, and that it would be most pleasing to the pope and to himself to pay it. With great naiveté, Doria entrusted this demonstration of good faith by the Holy See in the matter to no less than Giuseppe Bonaparte.

The latter, angered by the harshness of the first response and disregarding the subsequent acquiescence on the part of the papal government, left the capital, anticipating the tragic consequences. From Florence, he called for the harshest revenge against Rome and the Pontifical government, which he described as "clever and bold in carrying out the crime, despicable and sneaky when this had been committed." General Alexandre Berthier received the order to march on Rome to impose the republican will on the capital of the deception.

On February 8 Pius VI issued an edict ordering that his subjects not hinder the French who were about to arrive. They were encamped on Monte Mario, from which point they controlled the city. Meanwhile patriots were organizing themselves to proclaim the Roman Republic. In echelon, the occupying troops entered the city and took position in strategic places: the Campidoglio and the Quirinal.[3] Even the friars of the Ara Coeli were evicted in order to make room for the new arrivals.

On June 10 Berthier took control of the Castel Sant'Angelo. Then he informed the pope of the conditions of the reparation. They were appalling: monetary contributions, confiscation of works of art, the provision of horses and the height of contempt: the erection of monuments in the places where Bassville and Duphot had been killed. The pope accepted it all.

The hope of the French was that Rome would revolt, but it did not happen. If there were a revolt, the occupiers hoped that the pope would leave on his own initiative. This did not take place either. Berthier had to write to Paris: "The pope has entrusted himself completely to the generosity of the French without mentioning any departure from Rome, and this puts me into a very embarrassing position. The people are stunned and up to now have made no movement in favor of liberty."

The prolonged deadlock and the consolidation of French domination of the city gave courage to the timid, who, as an act of disrespect, took to the streets on February 15, the anniversary of the election of Pius VI. A giant tree of liberty was erected in the Piazza del Campidoglio. Former priests and friars kissed the liberty tree just as they had once kissed the cross. The Jews were very happy and had reason to be. In the past they had been forced to live in the ghetto, subject to various restrictions, and they were about to enjoy a liberation that was theoretical before it actually

[3] The Quirinal Palace was the residence of the pope at the time.

affected society. Even this, however, did not suffice to give dignity to a regime that was preparing to commit more abuses of power.

About midday the flag of the Roman Republic was unfurled in the tower of the Campidoglio, next to that of France.

The Jacobins[4] had wanted to ruin the pope's feast by proclaiming the Republic on the anniversary of his coronation. They were not thinking that this would coincide with Mardi Gras, the culmination of the carnival: a festival even more appropriate to public displays that the new regime was preparing to celebrate.

In the days that followed, liberty trees were put up in all the districts of Rome. Even in the Piazza Santa Maria della Consolazione, where Don Francesco's apartment was located, the new era was celebrated with high-sounding discourses. At the Campo Vaccino, as the Roman Forum was then called, in addition to planting the symbolic tree, the post where the medieval penalty of flogging had been applied was torn down. There were some good ideas, but they were accompanied by contradictory rituals that mixed the sacred and the irreverent, just as in a carnival. But in this carnival they weren't joking. The masqueraders were convinced they were doing something serious.

A series of provisions hostile to the institutional Church began: the suppression of convents, confiscation of the property of the confraternities, and rewards to the religious men and women who were abandoning their convents. They tried to induce men and women of religious orders to get married, using the lure of economic subsidies. There was a great collapse of religious institutes, both male and female, as well as of the secular clergy. It was a mystery to no one that many had begun a career in religious life or the priesthood without a true vocation.

The College of Cardinals did not present a better picture by

[4] The Jacobins were originally a political club that gained power for a time during the French Revolution and were largely responsible for the Reign of Terror.

any means. On February 18 the cardinals participated in a religious function in Saint Peter's, convoked by General Berthier, to give thanks for the liberation of Rome. Mass and a *Te Deum* were celebrated under the cupola, on the main altar.

It was an appalling spectacle. Some of the cardinals were seen to be weeping, but a few days later all were seen at a ceremony in the Piazza of Saint Peter's for an elegy to Duphot, the "immortal hero." The ashes of that poor victim of his own fanaticism were transported to the Piazza del Campidoglio in a solemn cortege of prelates.

Sometime later two cardinals resigned the cardinalate to avoid trouble. These were the "most eminent Antici and Altieri."[5] This deed "greatly scandalized all good people," because it was known how they had intrigued to obtain that dignity, which the pope had been reluctant to grant.

Some of the hierarchy stood their ground. Bishops Ercole Consalvi, Giovanni Barberi and Carlo Crivelli, for example, were jailed in the Castel Sant'Angelo for their opposition to the new regime. There were many fearless priests, beginning with Don Francesco. He had never sought economic advantages or positions of power and remained a simple priest, and this offered him some protection from special oppression. Nevertheless, he never hid behind anonymity. He made no secret of his own convictions and, while revealing them without bitterness, professed fidelity to the pope when put to the test.

The old pope made a better impression. General Berthier had hoped that he would leave Rome on his own, but the pope resisted courageously. He had declared that only violence could separate him from his people, and he stuck to that declaration. On

[5] This was Vincenzo Maria Altieri, a member of the same family that occupied the Altieri Palace in which Saint Gaspar's father was a cook and in which the del Bufalo family lived.

February 20, he was forced to leave the Vatican and embark on the path of exile. The populace understood the magnitude of the event and offered the deported pope a veneration that spoke volumes about the people's spirit. The French understood this and, even in the harshness of the repressive provisions that they continued to adopt or approve, blocked the path to any radical atheism on the part of the angriest "patriots" and maintained a pretence of deference toward religious values.

There was an attempt to elect an antipope, Monsignor Emanuel de Gregorio, who, however, was wise enough to refuse and to flee Rome. He escaped and went to the pope, at Certosa di Firenze. Monsignor de Gregorio was the civil *locum tenens* of the Vicariate. After him, the responsibility for directing the office, all the more important in the vacuum of power, passed on to Monsignor Francesco Saverio Passari.

In the "glorious" republican undertakings, former priests, friars and nuns distinguished themselves, as had happened in France at the time of the Revolution. The Scolopi Fathers Faustino Gagliuffi and Urbano Lampredi founded a journal overflowing with enthusiasm for the new era and dreams of "eternal glory." There was also the pastor of San Lorenzo in Lucina, Don Carlo Fischler, who maintained that the new Republic was not at all in conflict with the Gospel, with the Catholic Church and with her dogmas. Monsignor Claudio della Valle, of the Lateran Chapter, and Monsignor Giovanni Bufalini, of the Chapter of Saint Peter, bowed ceremoniously before the trees of liberty.

But on February 25, toward four in the afternoon, a crowd from Trastevere, composed of men, women and children and preceded by a crucifix, crossed the Ponte Sisto with church bells sounding. Some French, men of the national guard, and Jews encountered on the way were killed or thrown into the Tiber. It was a full blown popular revolt.

General Berthier ordered an immediate repression to prevent the uprising from spreading in the districts of the Borgo, Regola and Monti, which were already in a ferment. The maneuver succeeded. Those in revolt who were marching on the Ghetto to sack it were chased back across the Tiber and besieged. There were many deaths and numerous prisoners. Among the latter were the pastors of the parishes of Santa Maria in Trastevere, San Crisogono, San Marcello, Santi Vincenzo e Anastasio alla Regola and others, among whom was Father Giovanni Marchetti, president of the boarding school of the Gesù,.[6] In the following days the prisoners were brought to trial in various places, but the priests were given their freedom.

The news of the revolt of Trastevere, but not its rapid repression, spread through the Castelli Romani[7], which rebelled immediately. Albano, Castelgandolfo and Velletri rose up in mass. The few French and their collaborators were killed. Believing that they had crushed the Republic in their towns, the rebels moved toward Rome to give their strong support to those who were also revolting and to celebrate with them.

At Frattocchie,[8] however, they met General Murat, who hurried to stop them with brute force. They were engaged in a hopeless battle that lasted a few hours. In the retreat, some found refuge in the papal palace of Castelgandolfo, but were captured and massacred.

On March 16, there was a celebration of the salvation of the

[6] Giovanni Marchetti was Saint Gaspar's spiritual director during his younger years. Gaspar also attended Marchetti's academy, where courses on preaching were offered. In 1814 he was influential in helping Gaspar discern his vocation and later offered support for the fledgling Congregation of the Most Precious Blood.

[7] The Castelli Romani (literally, "Roman Castles") is the name of the hill country south of Rome.

[8] A community that was about 12 miles south of Rome. It is just south of the modern-day Ciampino airport on the Via Appia Nuova.

Republic in the Piazza della Consolazione, right under Albertini's windows. While much loud carousing was taking place around the tree of liberty and the wine was flowing freely, a certain Melchiorre De Gasperi fell from a wagon, hit his head on a rock and died. The funeral rites took place in San Nicola in Carcere, and the curate noted the context of the death without a hint of anger, but also without keeping silent about the abnormal circumstances of the drama.

Hearing the high-sounding discourses against the Church that were taking place around the liberty tree led Don Francesco to become bitter but not angry. He did not judge the protagonists of those noisy gatherings harshly. No one knew better how to separate the sin from the sinner. By his way of reasoning, he concluded that "it was entirely the devil's fault." Those poor young people, whose minds were so carried away by passion, were to be pitied. He even shared some of their criticisms in substance, while rejecting their methods. One does not speak of one's parents like this and the Church is our mother!

While the "patriots" were getting drunk on wine and words, the French, through the Swiss banker Emmanuel Haller, seized the pope's property. Meanwhile a systematic plundering was perpetrated by the French, and there were many reprobates who took part. Robbing churches had practically become something virtuous. They went so far as to take the roof off the monastery of the Paolotte in order to plunder the precious objects. The misery spread and spurred criminal activity.

One can imagine that in the midst of such havoc commerce was in ruins. In the middle of April, "Citizen Maria Angela Albertini" received a letter from Pesaro, in which a certain Ottavio Fabbri wrote her: "For your information, I advise you that today we find ourselves under the Cisalpine Republic, thus we cannot agree on the money." He meant to say that he could agree

most readily, as long as his proposed new prices were accepted. For clarification, he indicated the new exchange rate, which included a devaluation of fifty per cent. Sixty baiocchi coins now were worth thirty baiocchi, and so on. Fabbri insisted that he was sorry about the matter but, as he wrote: "if we do not do this we will not recover our capital." In fact it was rumored that the current coinage would be eliminated and replaced. Metal coinage would keep its intrinsic value.

On April 29, 1798, Giovanni Battista Albertini died. The family business was now firmly in the hands of Domenico Mazzoneschi and his sister. Don Francesco, who did not have a part in it, contributed as he was able to the needs of the family from his own modest resources. No one had yet decided to give him a benefice.

The suppression of the convents and religious confraternities by the French aimed at finding resources for meeting the expenses of government. The considerable patrimonies of the confraternities had been acquired through donations from the people and had been administered by the people themselves – under the control of church authorities – by means of elected bodies of the members. The confiscation produced great discontent and was of little benefit for the shaky finances of the Republic, because few people were disposed to buy the confiscated goods, given the severe canonical sanctions and an uncertain future.

The government sought to placate popular discontent with gifts, free dinners, and forgiveness of debts, but these were not enough to counter the discontent. Money was becoming worthless, and the new Republican festivals, meant to supplant the old feasts so dear to the people's hearts, were not popular.

In June 1798 Don Francesco was granted the faculties for hearing confessions. From then on there was always a long line

at his confessional, as if a safe haven in a storm. He was always cordial and comforting with penitents. We can imagine the beautiful conversations he had face to face with the men and with the women through the grate of the confessional.

In the ministry of the confessional he was very successful in embodying the priestly mission, in that his penitents seemed to be dealing with Jesus himself! In the parish, people would confide in one another:

– How long has it been since you went to confession?

– And who remembers that?

– Why not go to Don Francesco? He will turn you inside out like a sock. You won't even notice it, but he will send you out at peace with yourself.

Meanwhile new revolts at Città di Castello had spread in the region of Trasimeno.[9] The Republic was not at peace. Repressive measures were meant to even the score after the killing of about a hundred Republican victims. Città di Castello was besieged, taken, and plundered to serve as a warning to others. Many priests and monks were put to the sword. After this the Republic became even less popular.

The bridges on the Tiber, closed with wooden railings and guarded by soldiers, were meant to isolate the people of Trastevere, who were always ready for a fight. In July, when they were still dealing with the aftereffects of the revolt in Trasimeno, sad news arrived from the south. Veroli and Alatri had risen up, and there had been mass slaughters.

Immediately afterwards there were also uprisings in Ferentino and Frosinone. Following the example of those important centers, the smaller towns knocked down the liberty trees and assaulted their supporters. There were many dead. The worst took place in the following days when the department of

[9] Lake Trasimeno is located in Umbria, as is Città di Castello.

Circeo rebelled. At a certain point some twenty-two towns had overthrown the Republican regime. It appeared to be a favorable moment.

Immediately, however, General Antoine Girardon ordered French troops and Polish mercenaries to depart from Rome, with full powers, even for summary justice, against "the heads, authors and instigators of the rebellion, especially the priests." Girardon attacked the rebellious territory with determination.

The repression was violent. Gradually Ferentino, Frosinone, Veroli, Alatri and Priverno fell. The final resistance of the rebels was concentrated in Terracina and was strong, thanks to the support of the Bourbon regime. The losses were numerous, whether through the actual fighting or by the malaria that infested the region. On August 10, the French troops gained the upper hand and entered the city, only to find it deserted. The combatants had taken refuge in the Kingdom of Naples, either by way of the sea or the mountains.

By now the rebels had grown accustomed to gamble with their lives. In Sonnino the anti-republican forces were condemned to death "for having knocked down the liberty tree in Roccasecca." The trials, held in successive stages in the Church of Sant'Angelo, concluded with the death sentence for more than twenty persons, who were shot by Polish troops in late September of 1798.

Ferdinand IV of Naples thought that he could defeat the Roman Republic.[10] If he were to succeed in the venture, he would be rid of an awkward neighbor and would be honoring his title as "most Christian king." In November he crossed the border at Ceprano and Terracina and marched toward Rome, where the French troops retreated. In a week he restored the pontifical

[10] The Kingdom of Naples was the largest of the political entities that made up Italy at the time. Ferdinand was a member of the Spanish Bourbon family and was opposed to France.

power. The Romans, however, did not have reason to celebrate: the Neapolitan troops set themselves to stealing whatever had not been plundered by the "Transalpines."

Monsignor Passari, "exulting because of the great hope that now at last the time of subversion was finished," ordered the celebration of solemn festivities. Ferdinand, who had liberated Rome on November 27, had to abandon the city on December 13. He was followed by Monsignor Passari, who feared reprisals for the festivities that had just concluded. The vice-regent left his office in the hands of Monsignor Ottavio Boni, along with the instructions of Pius VI, who forbade taking an oath of fidelity to the Republic.

What had happened? General Championnet reorganized the French forces and counterattacked, invading Rome. Not content with this, he pursued the retreating Neapolitan forces. He penetrated their territory and was marching victoriously toward Naples.

The notice of the defeat of the Neapolitans was made in the Teatro Valle, during the performance, on the evenings of January 1 through 11, in a crescendo of libertarian rejoicing, as the French gradually neared Naples. The play being presented was *I Baccanali*, whose theme was in keeping with the euphoria of the moment. Into the production were introduced mad prelates and risqué nuns. The spectators, sympathetic to the French, felt safe enough to dare shouting out what they felt:

– Death to tyrants!

– Viva la Repubblica!

– Death to Messalina del Sebeto![11]

– Death to the pope!

[11] Messalina was the third wife of the emperor Claudius. The Sebeto was a river that once ran through Naples, so the play gave an opportunity to denounce the Kingdom of Naples.

On January 20, a letter of General Moin was read in all the theaters, announcing the capture of Capua. Then Naples fell, and the Patenopean Republic was established there, modeled on the Roman Republic.

Don Filippo Massaruti died and was succeeded as pastor of San Nicola in Carcere by Don Michele Reboa, whose associate pastor was Don Giacomo De Vecchi. They both had to learn to live with the new calendar. When the Neapolitans arrived it was Brumaio, that is, November. They left when the French returned in Frumaio, that is, December.

By now the French had imposed the new calendar, which created great confusion since the months of the new calendar did not coincide with those of the old. The new calendar was a thinly veiled attempt to erase every trace of religion over the course of time. And as the months of the year had been changed, so were many feast days as well as place names of the city and its districts, which were so dear to the hearts of the people. It seemed as though the Republic really was trying to commit political suicide and was actually seeking to be unpopular. With a certain awareness of cause and of foresight, Pasquino declared:

My dear Marforio, tell me:
What will become of the feast days?
I see trees without roots,
Phrygian hats without heads...

The two images referred to the liberty trees and to the hats customarily worn by those who supported the French Revolution and the Roman Republic, which appeared to float through the streets without anyone under them.

One of the great ironies was that there were new parasites who supplanted the old ones. The former had lost no time in

donning the feathers of those hated peacocks and had also contracted their vices. The most scathing example was found in the following dialogue. Pasquino said: "But now is there no difference between a consul and a cardinal?" Marforio replied: "There is a difference, nevertheless. The cardinals at least did not have a wife that they would cover with jewels."

Meanwhile Monsignor Boni, tricked and intimidated, published a notice that declared licit a certain oath whose terms satisfied the republicans but did not reflect the thinking of the pope. Many accepted the formula, which reconciled conscience and interests. But Pius VI made known his own convictions. Monsignor Boni (whom the pope ironically called "*troppo bono*" or "too good"), quickly issued a second notice that retracted the first, and many then retracted their oath.

The taxation became ever more insane, and the plunder of the churches drove people to exasperation. Orvieto rebelled, fearing that the reliquary with the miraculous corporal would be seized.[12] The churches were being stripped and the "liberators" removed the bells so that they could be melted down into metal for cannons. Even the big bell of the Campidoglio was not spared and ended up as private silver. All Romans who possessed silver cutlery were forced to give half to the government. All of the goods that were requisitioned by the Republic ended up in the hands of the French and headed north. It remained for the Republicans to sing the praises, with great rhetorical exercises, of the beauty of the new times that begun.

The peak of self-parody was the erection of a statue of liberty in the Piazza del Popolo with the inscription: *Matri Magnae Filia Grata, Alla Gran Madre la Figlia Grata* 'To a great

[12] The miraculous corporal dates from the 13th century, when a priest in Bolsena, skeptical of the doctrine of transubstantiation, broke the host and blood came forth. This miracle was considered to be an affirmation of transubstantiation.

mother [from] her grateful daughter'. The great mother was liberty, personified by France; the grateful daughter was the Roman Republic. Pasquino translated: "*La Madre Magna, la Figlia Gratta*" 'The Great Mother, the Daughter scratches.'

Chapter 9
REVOLUTION IN THE PARISH

In the spring of 1799 the Austrians once again took the initiative and marched toward the Po River. It was their intention to liberate the pope. Pius VI had established his provisional see at a Carthusian monastery near Florence. The Directory decided to deport him to France, to a more secure location. The elderly pontiff was dragged off unceremoniously and died at Valenza from the strain of the journey, pardoning his persecutors, on August 19, 1799.

The necessities of war forced the Directory to withdraw its support from the republics. A new initiative from Naples brought about the conquest of Rome. On September 30 the pastor of San Nicola in Carcere could write in the parish register: "This date, with God's help, marked the end of the Roman Republic, amid the curse of all the wicked and the joy of all the good people. May God be thanked forever!" A little while later, on November 9, Napoleon deposed the Directory and had himself named the first consul of the Republic.

Don Francesco was nearly thirty. The revolutionary events had been a test bench for the ideas that he had always professed. One could no longer continue to be a priest as one had in the past. One could say all kinds of bad things about the French Revolution and with justification, but it had produced one positive effect: Christians were forced to wake up and realize that they had been on a ship that was, for good or evil, sailing along as if by itself. One could say all sorts of bad things about the Roman Republic and make it the butt of irony and sarcasm, but its intentions were in many cases good, even if they were not realized. In addition, it had demonstrated that in many areas there was hypocrisy among churchmen and a sclerosis that affected church structures. The

turbulent times had separated the chaff from the wheat. Albertini and others considered the events of the past as providential and a punishment of God for the sinful Church.

"If we do not experience a conversion worse will happen," they would say.

The abrogation of feudalism, the proclamation of human rights and the abolition of slavery should have been enacted by the Church, but instead these were the work of the Revolution. The Church should have stopped or abolished the formation of ghettoes and the treatment of Jews as second-class citizens. The Republic sought to do this. The Gospel contains the principles for a better humanism, but it had been reduced to a book of consolation and the justification of advantages for the few. The Church would have been persecuted all the same, as a witness to the transcendent, but was mainly persecuted for the hardening of its mistaken positions, for its privileges and, one could say, for its immanence or worldliness. Albertini wanted to be an absolute witness to the transcendent.

In a world of arrogant social climbers, he would be humble; in a structure longing for riches, he would be poor; in an epoch of materialism, he would think only of the soul and its worth; while egoism was triumphing, he would act always and only out of love.

His soul shone above all during the celebration of Mass. When he held up the chalice in that Roman landscape that was witness to the fall of the human empire and the hard work of bringing about the reign of God, he appeared absorbed and ardent. "The single thought that souls had cost Jesus so much Blood broke his heart out of tender love for his beloved Savior." It was from that realistic meditation, from holding in his own hand the price of the world, that the apostolic spirit of Don Francesco was born. Had it not been for his awareness of the needs of society,

he would have remained in joyful intimacy with God in the absolute secrecy that so satisfied him.

But how worrisome was the pervasive indifference to the Redeemer! Christ had shed his Blood to redeem the world, and the world went on as if it had not noticed. Don Francesco was prepared to shed his own blood so that the Blood of Jesus would not be shed in vain. He remembered the verse from Scripture in which God warns: "If I say to the wicked, O wicked man, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand" (Ezek 33: 8). How many of his brothers and sisters were at risk of perdition? What a responsibility!

In December of 1799 Don Francesco was approved to be a confessor for nuns.[1] He was immediately entrusted with the care of some monasteries that had been disrupted by events during the time of the Republic. It was an extraordinary measure, since the spiritual direction of monasteries generally required priests with more "rank." Don Francesco had arrived at the age of thirty without having a benefice, without being able to add another title to that of "priest." The cardinal vicar of Rome had appointed him to be the coadjutor (assistant) of the archpriest of San Nicola, but this did not involve a benefice.

Because he was not a mediocre priest, he was careful not to work in proportion to what he was paid, nor did he expect to be paid on the basis of his work. He considered it a privilege to labor for the Lord, and that was payment enough.

On March 14, 1800, a new pope, Barnaba Chiaramonti of Cesena, was elected in Venice after a conclave of three months. He took the name of Pius VII, in homage to Pius VI, also from Cesena,

[1] As noted earlier, a priest had to be given the faculty for hearing confessions and, until fairly recently, one had to be given special faculties to be the regular confessor of nuns.

who in his old age had proved himself to be a hero and thus had made amends for his nepotism and a certain inclination to worldliness.[2] The election was credited to the mediating ability of the secretary of the conclave, Ercole Consalvi. The cardinals were divided into two opposing parties, each of which wanted a pontiff favorable to them. Pius VII was presented as a moderate and a neutral who would not widen the rift between them.

Rome was now an open city controlled by Naples. There remained the task of healing all the quarreling factions: a few hundred French soldiers, squads of Austrians, 200 English troops, and even some unrepentant Republicans. Anything could happen now that Napoleon had regained the military initiative in northern Italy, attacking Austria. The first skirmishes perpetuated the myth of Napoleon, the invincible commander.

On October 28, 1800, a canonry[3] became vacant at San Nicola in Carcere, owing to the death of Don Vincenzo Galassi. Someone alerted the cardinal vicar that it was a shame that Albertini had been overlooked for such positions in the past. When Don Francesco saw that his appointment to the position was imminent, he had to be persuaded not to seek to have the appointment withdrawn, since he did not believe that he deserved it. At the same time, and perhaps precisely to induce him to accept the canonry, the cardinal entrusted to him the care of the monastery of nuns of St. Francis of Paola (the *Paolotte*), which was being reorganized after being disrupted during the time of the

[2] Pius VI gave his nephew the Palazzo Braschi on the occasion of his marriage in 1780. This was probably the last example of extravagant papal nepotism. The palazzo has been restored and now houses the Museum of Rome.

[3] A canon is a person who is a member of a body of clerics (called a *chapter*) who live according to a rule. They generally were obliged to say certain prayers together and often had duties to perform in a cathedral or other church. At the time of Albertini, a canonry also provided a regular income. St. Gaspar was also a canon, of the church of St. Mark's, a position from which he eventually resigned.

Republic. He accepted this willingly because St. Francis of Paola was among his most beloved spiritual mentors.

In the monastery of the Paolotte he had a life-changing encounter, forming a spiritual friendship with Sister Maria Agnese del Verbo Incarnato. She was a humble and only semiliterate religious, who, on the strength of her inner wisdom, had earned "the esteem and affection of many persons, of both ordinary citizens as well as of the nobility." Don Francesco became one of her greatest admirers.

Pius VII entered Rome on July 3, 1800. The city and the Papal States once again had their sovereign. This was confirmed in the peace of Luneville on February 9, 1801. The Church, however, and of course her temporal government, were now between the rock of France and the hard place of Austria, between progressives and conservatives. For historical reasons, the Church found herself more comfortable among the conservatives. Ideally she should have been involved in promoting change, since the concepts of liberty, fraternity and equality were genuine Gospel values.

It was not easy to coexist with these opposing forces, especially because their idealistic ideologies were often simply pretexts for establishing a political hegemony. The middle path that the Church wanted to follow was fraught with problems, given the mingling of spiritual and temporal power in the Papal States.

The Republican storm had demonstrated that Rome and the Papal States were not opposed to the pope, as the anticlerical journalists of the day wanted to believe. But neither were they solidly behind the pope, as those in the Vatican offices mistakenly believed, since they were judging from their traditional paternalistic perspective. The times had changed. New ideas that had been sown were attractive. Many of the old privileges were seen as anachronisms. Would the Church have the courage to offer a bold witness?

Faith kept the Church together. The good members of the laity, in the name of faith, accepted the government of the pope just as it was, both out of fear of something worse as well as out of the love of God. But was it right to rely on a noble and pure sentiment to prop up decrepit and unjust structures? What could better serve to save people and institutions which no longer had much to do with Christ, if not preaching? Don Francesco Albertini was persuaded that a converted Church could convert the world. It would not be easy in view of the opposing forces, but it was the only way.

The vacuum of power caused by the rapid turnover of regimes led to anarchy. The crimes that had been committed had started a chain reaction of hatred and vendettas. For too long bands of criminals had taken advantage of the confusion caused by the problems of the Roman Republic. The roads between one town and another, between one city and another, had become insecure. It would take years for the wounds to heal.

On June 13, 1801, an edict was issued, taking note of the increased number of "seditious unions and cabals of criminals." Responsibility for the situation was attributed to the Republican regime. The cause was in large part due to the grave economic crisis, which the experience of the Republic had only made worse. Families had been squeezed like lemons, and hunger, as one knows, is an evil counselor.

With the canonry, Don Francesco entered more deeply in managing the care of souls in San Nicola. Being a canon was something new for him, because the role of a curate, or parish priest, was generally an exercise in bureaucracy. The clergy sat and waited. A curate knew his obligation to satisfy, more or less well, the needs of the faithful who came to him: he baptized, gave communion, heard confessions, celebrated weddings and conducted funerals. The task of moral supervision was

also entrusted to the cleric, but was exercised without fatherly motivation so that he practically assumed the role of a police officer.

It was not like that at San Nicola. People saw miracles. With apostolic zeal, Don Francesco began to give religious instruction to the young boys and girls, to instruct the adults and to proclaim to all the truth of the Gospel, illustrating his speech with examples from life. Families experienced reconciliation, hooligans began abstaining from drinking and gambling, and the poor were given generous assistance. There was a new flowering of the spirit of Jesus Christ in the community.

Don Francesco had no thought of enriching himself through the priesthood, and he actually grew poorer, giving away whatever he had. When he had nothing of his own to give, he begged alms from the wealthy of the parish. The people had not seen this kind of ministry before.

His new responsibilities did not lead him to forget his old ones. He continued to visit Santa Galla. "When he was not able to go in person, he would enlist others verbally or in writing" to go to spend their time in that charitable work. He would do the same in other areas of ministry within a large radius of San Nicola.

He had no other interests but the salvation of souls. The proof of this was his appearance and the way he lived. Unkempt, with soiled and disheveled clothing, he would eat what he could and when he could. He was available at all hours of the day and night and became something of a spectacle. People poured sarcasm on those ecclesiastics who grew fat while preaching about asceticism. No one could joke about Don Francesco, because he lived what he preached, and this was evident in his appearance. He voluntarily lived in extreme poverty, totally dedicated to others.

One rainy day Don Francesco found himself in the monastery of the Paolotte along with Cardinal Lorenzo Litta.

The latter, needing to return to his palace, was looking for someone to accompany him to the carriage with an umbrella and then from the carriage into the house, according to the protocol of the day. The superior of the community, Sister Maria Camilla, proposed Albertini for the task, and he willingly agreed to carry out this gesture of deference. When the prelate saw that he had to walk with Albertini at his side, he decided to leave by himself. He said: "Clean yourself up, Reverend Canon, and trim that beard!"

The cardinal, who returned home alone, contributed in a small way to the reform of a Church linked with outward appearances and privileges. Many prelates were learning their lessons. Monsignor Litta, for example, recognized Albertini "[as] a worthy person, held him in great esteem and admired his writings as full of great learning."

Clearly, he succeeded in capturing the hearts of the common people because he chose to share their life. Jesus said that the sick needed a physician and that he had come to call sinners to repentance; he had been sent to the lost sheep. The ministry of Don Francesco embodied that vision, that mission, since he worked among the marginalized. He had not derived any privileges from his ecclesiastical career. He could have led a much more comfortable life had he wanted to.

After the death of his uncle, Domenico, he entrusted the administration of his assets to a certain Filippo Raffaelli. Attachment to money was a noteworthy affliction among the clergy and was the theme of jokes. Don Francesco was noted for his detachment; his kingdom was not of this world.

When people were having an argument, merely announcing that Don Francesco had arrived or threatening to have recourse to him would lead people to settle their differences and end the quarreling. Often the belligerents, still gritting their teeth and not wanting to give in to an adversary, would let Don

Francesco have his way, saying: "You got the better of me when that servant of God came, otherwise..."

In his ministry he had an extraordinary concern for the sick. There were very many in the parish; they were crammed into the hospitals of the Consolazione. He had a more than maternal care for them. The result was that he soon found himself besieged by them. "And even though they became somewhat of a nuisance, he would respond to them with his customary pleasantness without ever showing the least disgust or regret."

He became a celebrated case in all of Rome and was the point of reference for the clergy. The young priests and clerics who were active in that part of the city held him to be a saint and sought him for counsel. Among the latter, one can mention the names of two priests who will figure prominently later in our narrative: Don Gaetano Bonanni and Don Gaspar del Bufalo.

The story would not be truly complete without reference to the bitter persecutions that Don Francesco experienced, often from colleagues in the priesthood. His generous ministry provoked jealousy. His commitment to serve without seeking recompense was threatening to those who made sure that they were paid for what they did. Albertini's "new" interpretation of priesthood made them uncomfortable. Don Francesco did not see this as a problem for himself. He followed the ancient principle: *Vince in bono malum*. 'Conquer evil with good'. His labors were certainly of God if they met with the hostility of the devil. They remained of God only if one did not give up on love.

He proposed to "conquer with sweetness those who were insulting him." In this way his fiercest adversaries very often became his admirers. For instance, he held the office of exorcist. It was an important task in itself, given the times, and was particularly important at San Nicola. The crypt of the church was used for the ritual of deliverance from evil spirits. The possessed

arrived from all over Rome, and sometimes, as in the Gospel stories, the encounters created a commotion. The surrounding walls were illustrated with scenes in which Satan had been defeated. That pictorial saga could have been enriched with new episodes, with Don Francesco as the valiant crusader.

It was the only area in which he felt that it was permissible to be scornful and violent. The more that he raged against the demon, the more he felt love for the demon's victims, the "poor sinners," and the more he stood on the side of the demon's enemy, God. His life became an ongoing exorcism: an unending fight to expel evil from the fabric of life. In this sense, he was a romantic hero just as he was, in his scholastic undertakings, a hero of the enlightenment.

He never failed to visit his mother each day. When he met her on the street, he would greet her with a bow and would kiss her hand. He was at her command as if he were a child. Mariangela determined how much and what he should eat. Always at the service of others, he enjoyed the experience of being the child his mother would look after. When someone would marvel at his touching deference to her, he would respond: "On this earth I have nothing that is dearer to me."

His behavior was both astonishing and amusing at the same time. Some would say: "Don Francesco is a big baby."

He was a sentimental sort who gave religious significance to his feelings. His mother was, for him, the Madonna, and the Madonna was the model for all Christians. He experienced a maternal dimension in his own priesthood. The faithful were his children, and he carried them all in his bosom. Judging from the expressions that he uttered or which flowed from his pen in the written word, he had no hesitation in unaffectedly expressing his affection, even toward women. And it was a marvelous thing that such an expansive inner intensity, bordering on the saccharine, did

not give cause for innuendo. His spirituality was so irrepressible as to make any hints of carnality impossible.

The esteem he enjoyed in Rome was evident in 1806. He was placed on a *terna*, or list of three names, for election as *camerlengo* of the Roman clergy,[4] and he was elected with a plurality of the votes. Don Francesco made every effort to be removed from this office, all the more so since a sizeable stipend was attached to it.

These events demonstrate in striking fashion the shortcomings of many ecclesiastical vocations. How many cardinals, bishops and priests, having embraced the choice of a vocation out of self interest, also abandoned it for the same reason? The priest in his unworthiness is another Christ. Don Francesco was convinced of this and felt the obligation to show this: first to himself, and then to others. He too felt the need to atone for his sins.

[4] The *camerlengo* or chamberlain of the Roman clergy was elected by the canons and parish clergy of the city and had a place of honor in processions and would preside over conferences of the clergy, among other duties.

Chapter 10
A FIRE BENEATH THE ASHES

A relic of the Blood of Christ was exposed for the veneration of the faithful in the church of San Nicola in Carcere. It had been donated by Prince Giulio Savelli, owner of the palace constructed over the ruins of the Teatro Marcello.[1] The relic was part of the family history because, according to legend, the founder of the family was the Roman centurion present on Calvary at the death of Jesus. The relic consisted of a rolled up piece of cloth from a soldier's cloak that had soaked up blood from the pierced side of Jesus. It was one of many relics of the passion found in Rome.

The prince was the last of the Savellis and donated the relic to San Nicola because it seemed to him that it did not receive the devotion it deserved in a palace that was often the scene of worldly festivities. The relic was at the foot of a much venerated crucifix that was said to have spoken to Saint Bridget. The relic and the crucifix were located in the chapel on the left side of the entrance. Eventually the veneration of crucifix and relic gave rise to a feast of the Most Precious Blood in which the entire parish participated.

In a certain sense, that place and the feast were related to the crypt and to the exorcisms that took place there. If the devil was defeated in the crypt, the victory was won by the Blood that destroyed the ancient bondage, redeemed slaves and freed humankind from the Evil One. Such truths, however, remained as if a fire that smolders beneath the ashes. The pall of forgetfulness did not diminish the fiery capacity of the embers, but neither did it permit the conditions necessary for them to blaze up.

Eleven ecclesiastics were assigned to officiate at the

[1] The building, also referred to simply as the Teatro Marcello, is located near San Nicola. St. Gaspar had an apartment there for much of his adult life.

basilica: an archpriest, six canons and four choir chaplains. Two of the canons were priests, two deacons and two subdeacons. The choir habit of the archpriest and canons consisted of the cassock with a cotta or surplice trimmed with lace, the biretta and the *almuzia*, a distinctive cape worn by canons.

Many famous persons had been clergy in the parish: Giovanni Gaetano Orsini, later Pope Nicolas III; Benedetto Caetani, later Pope Boniface VIII; and Rodrigo Borgia, later Pope Alexander VI. In addition, several famous cardinals had belonged to the clergy of San Nicola.

In the climate of the renewal of the first years of the nineteenth century, the church building was undergoing important restoration work by order of Pius VII.

The engine of restoration was Albertini, who employed some of his relatives in the work, in particular his uncle Domenico, who was a capable and versatile craftsman. Domenico was Mariangela's brother and a second father to her children. He was always ready to offer freely his many practical gifts for the restoration of the church. Many elements of his personality had been passed on to young Francesco. People noticed this and would say of the uncle: "He is a would-be priest! He could be the father of Don Francesco!"

He died on April 25, 1803, after having devoutly received the Viaticum[2] and anointing of the sick. He was seventy years old. Don Francesco wrote an affectionate and unaccustomed note in the death register. He described his uncle as "a pious man, assiduous in the practices of piety in San Nicola, promoter of the adornment of the house of God." These expressions, unique in the death register, show us beyond a doubt that Domenico was a deeply spiritual man and close to the heart of his nephew.

Through his deep and intense prayer life, Albertini found

[2] The reception of Holy Communion at the point of death.

himself drawn to ever greater interest in the relic. He would relive the scene in which the side of Christ was pierced. The story of the Savelli family was embroidered on the eyewitness testimony of John the evangelist, who wrote that from the open side of Christ "flowed blood and water" (Jn 19:34). The impression on the fabric of the relic was the gush of blood about which the holy fathers had recounted miraculous things. An inscription on a silver plaque on the ebony and glass reliquary commemorated the event: *De aqua, et sanguine DNJC, quae fluxerunt ex ejus sacratissimo latere, dum pendebat in cruce* "Of the water and blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ, which flowed from his most sacred side while he hung on the cross." It was the blood of the childbirth in which the Church was born. This was the Blood of the Covenant, of the Eucharistic chalice, in which the Church had been instituted!

Don Francesco already had a great attachment to the fatherhood of God, and now his thoughts focused on the Blood of Christ. In it, paternal and maternal love merge to form the image of the absolute Parent in whose arms we live, move, and have our being. God, the great Parent, had so loved the world that he sent, in the fullness of time, the Son to give up his life. The Father sends the Son for his children and pours out upon them the Spirit of love who reunites them with the Father. Every man and woman is in the heart of God. The proof of being in the center of Trinitarian love is the Blood.

Devotion to the Blood combined elements of romanticism and of the Enlightenment. The devotion permitted an intense reliving of the events that accompanied the suffering of Christ. The sign of the Blood[3] could be the basis for an entire theology of redemption.

Don Francesco was carried away by such transports. They began when he was about thirty-three years old, the age of Jesus

[3] Cf. Exodus 12: 13.

when he died. Albertini was living the passion of Christ. He found the greatest inspiration "in the morning, at the sacred altar, in consuming the Blood of Jesus."

He understood that he would need to rouse the people and promote this interior revolution. That is what he wanted: a spiritual revolution He thought that he had discovered the weapons for the time, the hidden secret of the ages: the true devotion of the Church and her inexhaustible source. If each Christian could understand his own worth, he would do everything possible to live accordingly. If each Christian had the worth of her neighbor, even the sinner, in mind, she would do everything possible to save that neighbor.

Albertini began thinking about instituting a sodality that would place devotion to the Blood of Redemption in its rightful place of honor. The sodality would promote this neglected treasure of the Church so that every member of the faithful would experience the same burning inner sentiments that he did. The project began to take shape on the first of July in 1807, during the annual celebration of the feast of the Most Precious Blood. For Albertini the true feast of the Blood had to be a vigorous Church, on fire with love.

The next day, the feast of the Visitation, Don Francesco was filled with great enthusiasm as he went on a customary visit to the Paolotte sisters. He informed them of the project that he had conceived. For some time he and the sisters had been preparing a sort of covenant for the renewal of the monastery, which was to be celebrated that morning. The project also aimed at the renewal of the Christian people.

In the chapel, before beginning Mass, standing at the foot of the altar, Don Francesco read and then signed the following declaration that had been agreed upon: "I, the undersigned most unworthy minister of the Lord, reflecting that the infinite mercy

of God has called me, without any merit of mine, to work for his divine glory and to obtain with every possible effort, aided by his most powerful grace, the eternal salvation and sanctification of souls, which cost such sufferings and the most precious life of our loving Jesus. I have been called to such a very noble aim together with Sister Maria Camilla di San Luigi, currently co-superior of the Minims[4] of Rome and also with Sister Maria Agnese del Verbo Incarnato, sister in the aforesaid monastery. In order to further ever more the divine dispositions and to obey the strong and most genuine impulse which the Lord has kindly given me . . . I freely and with all the faith and the enthusiasm of my spirit make a solemn vow to God almighty to consecrate myself to his most holy glory and to work always for the same, together with Sister Maria Camilla di San Luigi and Sister Maria Agnese del Verbo Incarnato. So be it."

The declaration of Don Francesco does not end here. "My dearest Jesus, who by the merits of your most horrible passion, solely and uniquely were able to implore your eternal Father to grant the outstanding honor of binding myself with a holy Vow. Accept this [Vow] in your most beloved Blood, on which, in which and through which I make it. Ah, give me such assistance, my dear Redeemer and great comfort, as I ask of you through your most loving heart and through your pierced Side. May I faithfully fulfill each and every obligation that this vow entails, all for your greater glory for which alone I intend to live and also to die. Amen. The day of the Visitation of the year 1807 on the altar of the Black Madonna in the Monastery of the Paolotte. Francesco Albertini, Canon of San Nicola in Carcere."

The Mass was, for this celebrant, a timeless ecstasy. He had assumed the responsibility of making the Church clearly visible in the monastery and had grounded that responsibility "on, in

[4] Another name for the Paolotte or Sisters of St. Francis of Paola.

and through the most beloved Blood of Christ." He was defining the nucleus and ultimate meaning of the Mass as the renewal of the covenant. Just as at the foot of Sinai and in the Cenacle, those present were to bind themselves with the Blood to the enterprise they were called to carry out.

And that is exactly what took place. After the Eucharistic consecration, Sister Maria Camilla and Sister Maria Agnese read a text prepared by Albertini that expressed their consent. It read: "We, the undersigned, having been assured by the most certain and indubitable means which the Lord makes use of for manifesting to creatures his most divine will, of being kindly destined by that same will to work for the glory of God together and jointly with Canon Don Francesco Albertini, presently the ordinary confessor of our Monastery, and not wishing in any way to offer resistance to the most loving divine dispositions now that we find ourselves before the sacred altar dedicated to our Dearest Mother Mary and about to be refreshed with the immaculate Flesh of the Only-begotten Son of the Eternal Father ... placing our mouths within that most precious chalice, where the Minister of the Lord at this very moment has consecrated the dearest Blood of our most loveable Redeemer, in this same Blood of eternal life we vow to God All-powerful to consecrate ourselves to the Divine glory and to work always for that glory together and jointly with Canon Don Francesco Albertini."

The combined declaration went on to implore Jesus to do his part in an undertaking so arduous and just. "It is for you now to give us those means and efficacious aids that are necessary to meet each and every obligation that is carried with this most sacred vow with which you yourself have willed to bind us. To you we entrust ourselves ..."

After having expressed their agreement with these ideas, the text, written by Albertini, exploded into a series of cheers:

"Long live the Glory of God whose daughters we will always be. Long live the Will of God, who has mercifully destined us for such an honor. Long live the Faithfulness of God, who will provide most abundantly all the assistance needed to fulfill our obligations. Amen."

It was quite evident that there was a connection between the episode in the monastery and Albertini's general view regarding the power of the relic of the Blood of Christ. What he had done with the monastery of the Minim Sisters, he wanted to do with the parish and with the world: to enter into a covenant with every parishioner and with every Christian. He wanted every Christian to feel the bond of Blood that was renewed in the celebration of Mass. For the ascetic of the Piazza Montanara, the Blood was the source of the undertaking and the seal upon it.

The events and the ceremony just described allow us to glimpse the personality of the man and his *modus operandi*. The spiritual direction of Don Francesco – and that connected with his role as ordinary confessor – was carried out in a very intense context of faith and human communication. It was his intention to form a single heart and a single soul with his disciples. In harmony with God's will, he would know everything of his disciples, and they would know everything of him, because they were committed to a work of edification, and the Blood was the protagonist in the undertaking.

The two sisters, and probably the entire community of Minims, had already been informed of the intentions of their director to establish an association centered on the relic of San Nicola in Carcere. They had followed along, step by step, because at every opportunity Don Francesco asked for their prayers. The sisters also knew of his desire to spread the devotion so needed and relevant. They were praying that Don Francesco would find the collaborators he wanted. The sisters were confident. In

particular, Sister Agnese del Verbo Incarnato declared that she was certain of his success.

The times did not engender a great deal of confidence. In the first years of the nineteenth century Pius VII had sought to accede to the aims of Napoleon. The Church was indebted to Bonaparte for the restoration of Catholicism in France after the anti-Christian orgies of the Revolution. The pope had accepted Napoleon's progressive investiture of himself as king and had even been induced to crown him as emperor in the cathedral of Paris. At the final moment, the autocrat had taken the crown from the hands of the pope and had placed it on his head by himself, a symbolic gesture that spoke clearly of his claimed supremacy. He thought the pope should be the "first minister of religion," dependent on the emperor like any other minister. The Catholic faith was to be an instrument of the Napoleonic empire.

The position of the emperor became final in 1807, at the very same time when the sodality in San Nicola in Carcere was at its germinal stage. Napoleon, having crushed Prussia, made it known to the pope that he had to enter into a coalition against the rest of the world. "Either the pope consents, thus saving his Papal States, or he will lose everything," Bonaparte said.

Pius VII was clear in his refusal. Napoleon could not accept this. How could "the pack of priests of Rome" resist the imperial will? On January 21, 1808, he ordered General Miollis to invade the Papal States and to occupy Rome. On February 2 the French troops were in control of the city and then marched on Naples and conquered that city as well.

In the course of 1808, the pope was subjected to intimidation, oppression and moral violence. The cardinals were dispersed. The times of Pius VI were being repeated.

Chapter 11
THE ASSOCIATION

In the course of the thorough restructuring that took place in the church of San Nicola in Carcere, the crucifix and the relic of the Most Precious Blood that stood beneath it were transferred to the Pierleoni Chapel, the second chapel on the right. On March 18, 1808, the altar was privileged with a plenary indulgence *pro anima ipsa* 'for the very soul' of the one for whom the Mass was offered. A marble memorial of the privilege was placed on the right. It was a tribute to the saving power of the Blood even for the dead.

The transfer ended up being a response to a long sensed need: the creation of a new center of attraction for popular piety. The life of the parish suffered from the evil of the epoch: the fragmentation of religiosity. The city and the countryside were dotted with churches and chapels, each with its clientele and feasts. The parish churches and even the basilicas ended up being an aggregation of small churches, so many were the side chapels built and cared for by families and institutions.

The parish was regarded by the people as a sort of registry office of the faith: it was the place where baptisms, confirmations, marriages and funerals would take place. Albertini, however, saw the parish as a center from which apostolic work would radiate, the heart, as it were, of the religious life of the people. Thus the initiative of the Chapel of the Crucifix and of the Most Precious Blood aimed at being something new and different. It was a project to promote change. Don Francesco intended to make the place and the sodality into a rallying point for parishioners and for others as well.

In a meeting of the chapter, Don Francesco raised the issue of finding something "that would be able to attract the faithful." He knew very well how to reach that goal. To attract the

faithful there was nothing better than the devotion to the Most Precious Blood, "all the more since the feast was celebrated on the first Sunday of July as a double of the first class."[1] To attract the faithful meant to get them to flock to the church and even better to become Church. The influx of the faithful would increase the revenue of the church and would permit the maintenance of the basilica. This last argument could not be displeasing to the vestry board.

Once the plan had its first success, Don Francesco would have been pleased to entrust the responsibility to others so that he could move back into the wings. This was his plan, but for the moment there were no candidates on the horizon to whom he could entrust his role.

In those days Don Gaetano Bonanni, Don Gaspar del Bufalo, Don Adriano Giampedi, Don Luigi Gonnelli and Don Antonio Savelli, all zealous priests who had been active in the area for some time, were looking for a center where they could establish an evening oratory, an apostolate for the catechesis of adults, who could attend such a gathering only in the evening. Having requested the church of Saint Omobono in vain, they finally obtained the church of Santa Maria in Vincis,[2] dependent on San Nicola in Carcere. The concession of the church to those priests was certainly authorized or confirmed by the chapter of San Nicola, and Don Francesco was delighted. He participated at some of the meetings at Santa Maria in Vincis, both to observe and to collaborate.

Don Francesco informed the priests of his own intentions.

[1] This was a classification of the rank of feasts that continued to be used until the reform of the liturgy after the Second Vatican Council. A double of the first class would be equivalent to *solemnity* in the current ranking of liturgical celebrations.

[2] The church of Santa Maria in Vincis, now demolished, was located along the Capitoline hill, more or less across the present-day street from San Nicola in Carcere. Saint Omobono is still extant and is also across from San Nicola.

Bonanni remained doubtful. It seemed to him to be a duplication of effort. He declared himself ready to suspend his own activities, at least in that area. The aim of their apostolic efforts was the same, even if Albertini envisioned a more structured organization while the evening oratory was open to anyone who wished to attend. Albertini dispelled all of Bonanni's fears saying: "No, no. Just keep on. You will do good work in the evening and I in the morning. And thus *a solis ortu usque ad occasum laudabile nomen Domini* 'from the rising of the son even to its setting [may] the name of the Lord [be] praised' (cf. Psalm 113).

Albertini was attracted by this group of priests who cared for the oratory. If only he could have that team at his disposal to spread devotion to the Blood of Christ! Don Francesco had become quite impressed with the young Canon del Bufalo. He had met him at Santa Galla and considered him to be a promising ecclesiastic, a talented preacher, a skilled organizer. Now Albertini noted that he was beginning to stand out among his companions. He was associated with Bonanni, who remained his mentor, but Don Gaspar had great energy and promised to turn out to be a significant figure. Gaspar was attracting attention to himself even if he did not want to!

Gaspar possessed what Don Francesco lacked: an impulsive nature and fluent oratorical skills, a formal elegance and personal refinement. If Albertini was the more skilled in one-on-one conversations, del Bufalo excelled in the pulpit. He became dramatic before a big audience. He seemed to be possessed by an uncontainable force. He was like the celebrated fountains of Rome: waters pass through those monuments of stone to become festive springs, alluring and impressive.

Don Francesco was not the first to be attracted by the young cleric, but he was without doubt the one who would have the greatest influence on him. This would happen only a few years

later. The quiet Albertini had nothing that would at first glance capture the attention of a brilliant young man who was fastidious about his personal appearance and already heavily involved in other projects. Besides, the spirituality, linked to the Blood of Christ, could not have been congenial to the young man, who felt repugnance at the signs of blood and who had already been attracted by devotion to the Sacred Heart.[3]

Don Francesco, inclined to read events as "God's alphabet," began to think that the activities of the evening oratory of Bonanni and of his own association could not only be scheduled on the same day, but could also be integrated into a single initiative. He drew up the outline of some rules for his own project and began to put them into practice. The focus was on the celebration of the Mass early in the morning before the working day began and the shops opened.

It was a happy intuition. In short order the church was filled with the faithful as it never had been before. In order not to offend the sensibilities of the members of the chapter, the initiative got its start with the chapter as its promoter. This was consistent with the self-effacing personality of Don Francesco, who had even invented a name for the decision to be hidden in life: *filotapinosi* 'the love of humble things.[4] It was also consistent

[3] It is worth noting that in the Church of the Gesù, next to the altar with the relic of Saint Francis Xavier, is a small chapel with a famous painting of the Sacred Heart, executed by Pompeo Batone, who is thought to have executed the original painting that later was modified to become the Madonna of the Precious Blood. It is thus not surprising that Gaspar would have been quite familiar with devotion to the Sacred Heart, given its prominence in that Jesuit church.

[4] The term could also mean "lover of humble things," a parallel to the figure of Philothea ("lover of God" or "friend of God"), to whom the *Introduction to the Devout Life* of St. Francis De Sales is addressed. Albertini wrote an *Introduction to the Humble Life* that is dedicated to Filotapinosi, and Gaspar in one of his letters (no. 397) appears to refer to this work as "the Filotapinosi," just as De Sales's work was sometimes referred to as "the Philothea."

with his concept of church life. The new institution would not be the guest of the parish, but would be its distinguishing mark.

Don Francesco summarized the ideals of the sodality in this way: "To promote the greater glory of God, the devotion and frequency of the sacraments among the people, especially among poor artisans, laborers and farm workers, and to obtain a more abundant suffrage for the souls of the deceased, particularly for those who have died in the hotels and inns who are ordinarily the most forgotten." The idea was then spelled out, affirming that those enrolled would have to "perform many pious works... of great spiritual cultivation among the large population of the surrounding area and of neighboring places and especially with the farm workers and day laborers, who are very abundant in the large parish."

Three aspects of the sodality are striking: its missionary vision, its deep roots in the parish, and its openness to the laity. The association was created with a view to action. The activity of the parish had to be directed principally to the fringes of the population, who were in general not being taken care of by the archpriest and his associates. The laity would have to assume this ministry.

Albertini's idea went beyond a parish organization. Even the concept of a missionary parish does not do it justice. Albertini set his sights on a movement that was without limits, which was, after all, implicit in the Blood of redemption, shed for all. There were some obstacles to realizing the vision, however.

To spread the devotion throughout the whole world would require an army of missionaries, who would mount the pulpit to announce the saving efficacy of the Blood of Christ to every person. Don Francesco felt paralyzed before such a prospect. He was inclined, as we know, to the ways of dialogue, to personal contacts, and he felt an invincible repugnance to put himself

forward or to be at the head of any undertaking. Besides, the work of spreading the devotion demanded the capacity to captivate the masses and to scale the barricades, as it were. This required self-promotion and organization.

Someone like Don Gaspar del Bufalo was needed. Albertini had harbored the thought for some time.

The association[5] was made up of men and women. It would always remain dependent on San Nicola, which would consider it as a filial organization. A canon of the chapter would head the association and would be elected yearly by the chapter itself, at the same time as the election of the other persons in charge. The number of those to be inscribed in the association was unlimited, but the number of persons in charge was fixed at fifteen for each branch (male and female), recalling the fifteen mysteries of the rosary.

A complex system of strict rules regulated the institute. Albertini maintained "that everything must be done with order, so that it would result in being agreeable and pleasing to the Lord." He was convinced that good order would depend "on good rules and carrying them out exactly." He wanted the chapter to delegate three canons to visit the association for fifteen days every two years. They were to speak with the members to verify that the rules were being observed.

In the course of the year Don Francesco obtained the needed permissions and then moved on to writing constitutions of the sodality.

The three canons assigned to govern the institution were Monsignor Pitorri, private chaplain of Pius VII, Don Gregorio Muccioli and, naturally, Albertini. The three were in strict

[5] The Italian word is *adunanza*, which can mean gathering or assembly. In this volume it will generally be translated as *association.* Eventually, of course, this association became the Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood.

agreement. Pitorri and Albertini were related by marriage. The triumvirate passed all the tests. They chose the fifteen men and fifteen women who were to be the representatives. They took care to bring together "the persons most qualified to be the foundation stones of the pious Association."

The chapter set the date of the inaugural ceremony for December 8, 1808. Albertini had a fondness for significant dates and numbers. There were many good reasons for judging the feast fitting to signal the birth of the new sodality. It fell on the first centenary of the donation of the relic of the Most Precious Blood to the parish. It was one of the principal Marian feasts, the Immaculate Conception, which recalled the mystery of the Incarnation. Mary gave her blood to the Word made flesh and was preserved from original sin through the merits of the Blood of her son.

The day was to be preceded by a novena that would take place in the morning after the usual Mass of the rosary. Don Francesco invited many priests to hear confessions. As was his custom he gave particular attention to the choice of the preacher. And whom did he call? Don Gaspar del Bufalo, a man he would be pleased to have within the Pious Association.

During the days prior to the inauguration of the Association, Albertini and Gaspar must have spoken frequently and at length. How else would Gaspar be able to communicate Albertini's ideas effectively?

On December 8, there was a general communion, in which a great many of the faithful participated. The sung Mass was triumphant: Monsignor Pitorri was the celebrant, and the musicians of the basilica lent beauty to the rite with the sound of the organ and the singing of polyphonic motets. Don Gaspar gave "moving and efficacious exhortations (*fervorini*)." At the end of the Mass "he made an energetic discourse, directed toward the

representatives, both men and women, in which he made them aware of the principal end of the newly founded Association and consequently, what was to be the spirit and disposition of those who were destined to become its foundation." He concluded by "animating and encouraging all to dedicate themselves entirely" to such a work.

The words of Gaspar to the Pious Association during the inaugural celebration could not have been other than those Albertini had used in describing the initiative. For his part, the young priest contributed the passionate fire and the rousing force that so pleased Don Francesco, who acted with his customary humility. At the moment the work was born, it was almost as if he did not exist. He was pleased to be off in a nook somewhere, happy that God's affairs were proceeding apace and that there was a young and zealous priest to whom he could eventually entrust his treasure.

The ceremonies concluded with the benediction of the Blessed Sacrament given by Monsignor Pitorri and the imposition of the rosary around the members' necks with a formula that called to mind the Blood of Christ.

One can imagine how in the following days Don Francesco hurried to visit the Minim Sisters to tell them what had taken place for the glory of God. In that account he could not omit a glowing report of the young Canon del Bufalo, who had so admirably sung the praises of the Blood of redemption. He was very devoted to Saint Francis Xavier and had the ardor of a missionary. If only there were only someone like Gaspar in the Association! If only they had a group of priests like those of the evening oratory! Then surely the devotion to the Most Precious Blood could be spread even beyond the parish and into the whole world, so that the payment of the ransom of humanity on the part of the Son of God would not be in vain.

Sister Maria Agnese, with the total confidence in God of a soul accustomed to living in the transcendent, reassured him about the entire plan and Don Gaspar's involvement in the work of the Association. The logic of the holy sister was elementary. Could the Lord deny his holy servant (Albertini) such an indispensable collaborator? She said: "Have no doubt. He will be the apostle who will spread the devotion to the Blood of Jesus!"

Albertini clung to the confidence that the sister had given him and began to work in that direction. The prophecy reflected the desire of Don Francesco, who tended to deflect any merit from himself and thus unconsciously gave greater weight to Sister Agnese's prophecy.

At that time he learned that Bonanni intended to transform the activity begun at Santa Maria in Vincis into an institution of the kind that had been formed in France by Saint John Francis Regis, a Jesuit. Don Gaetano Bonanni had just finished reading the life of that saint. Saint John, born in Fontcouverte in 1597, had entered the Jesuits in 1616 in Toulouse. As a Jesuit he had worked as a missionary in Languedoc, in the Pyrenees region of southern France. In the winter he gave himself to the apostolate in the most remote villages of the countryside in order to free prostitutes, give aid to the poor, and to preserve and expand the faith, especially by means of confraternities of the Blessed Sacrament. He died of exposure in the snow while carrying out his ministry. Bonanni felt inspired to do something similar by means of a priestly community that he intended to gather around himself.

Don Francesco may have been amazed at Bonanni's plans. Don Gaetano intended to carry out something which, even if vague at the time, was very similar to what Sister Maria Agnese had "promised" him! It would have been enough for the priests to adopt the devotion to the Blood of Jesus. Don Francesco was

happy with what had happened. In doing good there is no room for jealousy. Don Francesco must have told Bonanni: "The institute will be established. A holy sister has assured me of this."

On December 26, the chapter of the Association met to designate a president and this was, of course, Don Francesco. This time he was not able to withdraw, as he would have preferred. He accepted and, on the following day, in the sacristy of San Nicola, held the first meeting of the representatives. In the course of the meeting each was given his or her respective tasks.

The officials met on January 1, 1809. The Association was moving along satisfactorily. They began thinking about obtaining pontifical approval. They sent a request to Pius VII, at that time a prisoner of the French, who passed the matter on to Cardinal Despuig y Dameto, pro-vicar of Rome.

The examination was conducted by Bishop Benedetto Fenaja. It required much work but it went quickly. Monsignor Pitorri personally followed the process, and it concluded with a positive response. On February 27, the cardinal vicar was able to publish a decree of "the perpetual and apostolic approval of the Association and of its Constitutions." With that act, Albertini as president was solely in charge and could better focus on his course of action. The Association did remain dependent on the chapter of San Nicola in some areas.

An important aspect of the sodality was the call of the laity to carry out the ministry that was not being carried out by the clergy. Collaboration between clergy and laity was, however, involved in the first steps of the Association. The chapter of San Nicola acted generously by granting the chapel of the Crucifix to the new institute, "in the certain hope that it would serve to render the representatives ever more loving and ever more solicitous for their advancement and progress." It was a mixed blessing, however, for three prominent lay people accused the chapter of wanting to

burden the new institute with heavy debts.

The tension brought to light another dimension of the personality of Albertini: his rock-steady determination. Without losing his inner peace and his courteous ways, he was unwavering and decisive. "[E]verything finally succeeds with the omnipotent help of the Lord, who triumphs in everything." The three dissidents resigned and were replaced.

Further reflection convinced the new officials that possession of the chapel was an advantage and not merely a burden. At the next meeting, with Albertini presiding and in the presence of the archpriest Don Michele Reboa and of Don Francesco Pitorri, "there took place the solemn investiture of the Chapel of the Most Holy Crucifix for the benefit of the Association that had already been erected there."

Albertini introduced some practices of piety that gained the approval of the faithful: the rosary with *fervorini*, for example. To give these sermons he would call on capable priests and, more and more often, on Canon del Bufalo. In the course of 1809 Don Gaspar participated at least twice, certainly a sign of a special spiritual relationship that was growing.

Chapter 12
AN INFLAMMATORY RELIC

Reading over the dense articles of the Constitution of the Association, one does not notice the emphasis on the devotion to the Blood of Christ that one would expect. The Association would be obligated to celebrate the feast of the Most Precious Blood and many other feasts. It is true that the Blood occupied the first place in the inscription, but this derived from an obvious hierarchy of values. Not even in the practices of piety that were prescribed can one find evidence of the Blood. The Association was supposed to take care of the daily Mass, during which they were to recite the rosary. How can one explain the blaze of devotion to the Blood in the course of a few months? The answer must be found in the reflective and ascetic nature of Don Francesco, in the nature of the times and, above all, in the nature of the object of the devotion: the Blood.

The affirmation that a people of free, fraternal and equal persons – the Church – is born of the Blood of Christ is found in the words of institution in the Eucharist: "This is the chalice of my blood for the new and eternal covenant, poured out for you and for many..." The community of the new covenant is the Church.

Many scriptural references link blood with the covenant, including the book of Revelation: "... with your blood you purchased for God those from every tribe and tongue, people and nation. You made them a kingdom and priests for our God, and they will reign on earth" (Rev 5: 9-10).

The Christian vision included and surpassed the revolutionary utopia of a community of equals and the contemporary Napoleonic project of a single empire with a single emperor. The Church offers itself as a radical alternative. The pope and Napoleon found themselves on a collision course. Certainly

the pope was also resisting the French despot to defend his own state for political reasons. At the same time he had spiritual reasons for which he would be persecuted. The French revolution shed the blood of others; the Church stood ready to shed her own blood.

For these reasons the Pious Association, whose full name was "of the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, of the Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of the Holy Souls of Purgatory," immediately offered a vision totally centered on the Blood. It happened quickly. This was a sign that the devotion was responding to the sensibility of the time. There was blood on every frontier. The French Revolution demanded a river of blood to found a society where liberty, fraternity and equality would reign, forgetting that the Blood that could create such a society had already been shed nearly eighteen hundred years before. Such a society already existed: the Church.

The Church had its problems, however, since it appeared to have forgotten its true nature. At no time in its history had it offered a full witness to the Gospel. Had the Blood of Christ been shed in vain? One needed to remedy this serious shortcoming, allowing the Blood with its great power to generate its fruits. In the Blood of Christ was immanent the secret of the rebirth of religion and the inspiration to oppose Napoleon.

The basic concept was both elementary and powerful. All human beings, each individual person, have been redeemed by the Blood of the Son of God. The Blood of Jesus was poured out for me: therefore I must become holy so as not to render this shedding in vain. It was poured out for my neighbor: therefore I must do whatever I can to save him/her. All of life must be redeemed because Christ in his own Blood has assumed life from his conception until his death. There is nothing more precious than human life and the soul. Even at death, one's obligation to the

other continues because we still pray for the dead. Jesus subjected himself to the torments of the Passion and poured out his Blood for the salvation of the soul. Every soul is worth the Blood of Christ. There is no limit to the obligation to collaborate in the work of salvation.

The discourse was not purely spiritual. In order to save the soul, one's own and that of the other, it would be necessary to create a just social order. It is enough to think about the day of judgment as Jesus describes it: "Come, blessed of my Father... because I was hungry and you gave me to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me to drink, I was naked and you clothed me, sick and you cared for me...." One can imagine the revolutionary force such concepts would have when announced to the brutalized population of the Campo Vaccino (as the Roman Forum was called) or lurking among the weeds and ruins between the Palatine and Aventine hills. The ideas had even greater force because the one preaching these ideas was a man who lived them so fully that he became like a poor ragged beggar.

Albertini liked to call the sodality he founded the *Adunanza*, which hearkens back to the original name for the Church: an assembly, a gathering, a convocation (*assamblea, raduno, convocazione*). What Christ did when he gathered his disciples, the Blood of his side impressed on the cloth would likewise accomplish, because this cloth was soaked in the Blood of the Lord that gushed forth from his side, giving birth to the Church.[1] The relic that came to San Nicola was indeed incendiary. It was fire under the ashes. Events had stirred up the ashes and

[1] Many commentators on the piercing of Jesus' side came to see the flow of blood and water as symbolizing the sacraments of Eucharist and Baptism. Some commentators also suggest that there is a parallel to the story of the creation of Eve in Genesis 2. Just as Eve is born from the side of Adam, the Church is born from the side of the new Adam, Christ.

behold, the red hot coals were ready to set fire to Christian spirituality!

A few months later, Don Francesco provided the Association with specific prayers to nourish the devotion to the Blood of Redemption. He made a retreat in the house of the Vincentian Fathers in Montecitorio "to confer in greater solitude there with the Father of Lights about that which would be pleasing to His Divine Majesty for the progress of the [Association]." They were days of meditation and prayer and an uninterrupted series of mystical experiences.

Albertini composed the Chaplet of the Precious Blood along the lines of the rosary. The seven themes were: the Circumcision, the Garden of Olives, the Scourging, the Crowning with Thorns, the Way to Calvary, the Crucifixion, the Lancing of the Heart. The practice was spread in Rome and linked to the jubilee devotion of the Seven Churches.[2] This was not an entirely new devotion, since a work dedicated to the seven sheddings of the Blood of Jesus had been penned by Saint Philip Neri in 1598. This work differed in some ways from Albertini's Chaplet.

Meditations and prayers flowed from the fullness of his heart. The texts are directed toward helping the faithful relive the dramatic hours of the passion. The intention of the Chaplet is to stir up strong emotions in the soul of the one who prays, so that from such emotion would flow the desire to change one's life.

A few excerpts offer something of the flavor of the text. In the scourging, "when the skin was ripped and the flesh lacerated, that precious liquid flowed in streams from every part." On the journey to Calvary: "Oh, how much Blood did our dear Jesus shed

[2] The pilgrimage to the seven churches was revived and formalized by Saint Philip Neri. The churches were St. Peter's, Saint Paul's Outside the Walls, Saint John Lateran, Saint Lawrence Outside the Walls, Saint Mary Major, Holy Cross in Jerusalem and Saint Sebastian Outside the Walls.

from his veins on that sorrowful journey he made toward Calvary with the heavy wood of the Cross. The streets of Jerusalem and those places through which he passed remained bathed in that precious Blood." On the Crucifixion: "The Redeemer shed his Blood even more in the barbaric Crucifixion; when his veins were torn and his arteries were split, there flowed from his body, as a torrent, that saving balm of eternal life to pay for the wickedness of the universe."

Nearly all of the brief meditations, after the exposition of the shedding and its connection with a definite category of sins, find a sort of linchpin in the exclamation *deh!*[3] It is a kind of a final plea or peroration to arouse the faithful from their inertia and their negligence. It is the mediation by a brother to a brother or from a father to a son. The texts record, perhaps unintentionally, the specific charism of Don Francesco: to place himself quietly near, to suggest the right word without being seen.

He also composed a *Prayer to the Most Precious Blood*, which was to conclude the Chaplet. It is a hymn of love to the love of Christ, emotional and full of sorrowful expressions. "O most precious Blood of eternal life, mercy and ransom of the entire universe, drink and bath of our Souls, which continuously protect the cause of humanity before the throne of the supreme Mercy, I adore you profoundly, and wish as much as is possible for me to compensate you for the injuries and mistreatment that you continually receive from human beings, and especially from those who boldly burn to blaspheme you. And who will not bless this Blood of infinite value? Who will not feel on fire with emotion toward Jesus who sheds this Blood? Who would I be if I had not been redeemed by this Divine Blood? Who has not drawn Blood from the veins of my Lord to the last drop? Ah! This was certainly

[3] The word is an interjection that might be translated as "I pray," "for pity's sake," or "alas." The root is probably the Latin *deus,* 'god'.

love! Oh! Immense love, which has given us this most salutary balm! Oh! Priceless balm that flowed from the font of an immense love. Alas! Make all hearts and all tongues to adore you, praise you and give you thanks now and forever, and until the day of eternity. Amen."

After the retreat, Don Francesco was returning home with his notes folded in his pocket when he felt inspired to pass by the monastery of the Paolotte. He had asked the sisters to pray for him while he was drafting the prayers and now he wanted to share the results with them. He also wanted to hear the opinion of Sister Maria Agnese. He anticipated with joy the chance to pray with her in those words that were so displeasing to the devil.

As soon as Sister Maria Agnese saw him, she said to him: "You have brought me the Chaplet of the Most Precious Blood! What a beautiful gift you give me!"

Surprised, Don Francesco could only confirm what she had said. Yes, he had brought the Chaplet with him. The holy religious added to his amazement by telling him that no revisions were needed. "Publish it just as it came to you!"

A supernatural explanation of Sister Maria Agnese's reaction is not necessary. She was waiting anxiously for the Chaplet and considered herself unworthy to modify a text of her spiritual father, especially since she was an illiterate sister engaged in domestic work. Albertini, however, interpreted her words as a sign from heaven. The Chaplet was approved by Sister Maria Agnese. For him, it was as if she had written it. What would enter his head, he, the poor instrument in the hands of God? He lived in a world of miracles and angels were everywhere.

In the following days he presented the little manual to the Sacred Congregation of Rites[4] and, having obtained its approval,

had a thousand copies printed, which were quickly gone. By now the Association had become the *Association of the Most Precious Blood* and its aim had been declared: to spread the devotion to the Most Precious Blood. It was an important turning point. A new devotion was appearing on the religious horizon of Rome, and it was not just any devotion.

In June 1809 the progressive restriction of papal liberty that Napoleon had set in motion to weaken the pope was accomplished. Rome became French on the 10th of that month. At ten in the morning the pontifical standard was lowered over the Castel Sant'Angelo, and the flag of France was raised. The pope, after some indecision, sat down at a desk and signed the bull of excommunication which he had kept in reserve. It affected Napoleon and all who had collaborated with him in the sacrilegious act. In the afternoon the document was affixed to the doors of the basilicas, to the annoyance of the French, who feared an act like this but who were not expecting it. Perhaps they were thinking that the College of Cardinals was still like it had been in the days of Pius VI, ridiculous and cowardly.

The bull produced a great emotional response among the faithful of Rome. A unanimous movement of sympathy drew them close to a helpless pontiff who dared resist the invincible emperor. The day after it was published the great majority of citizens did not go to their usual place of work, believing that this would mean collaborating with the illegitimate government and that they would thus incur excommunication. It was an excessively rigid interpretation and far from the conciliatory mind of the pope. Pius VII had an appropriate instruction drafted that detailed the limits of the sanction.

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[4] A congregation of the Roman Curia that was in charge of supervising the liturgy of the Church and the process of canonizing saints. In 1969 it was divided into the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

The French reaction was what one would have expected. Investigators were deployed in the vain search for the one who dared to affix copies of the bull. Restrictive measures against the pope grew worse. All of the streets leading to the Quirinal, the palace of the pope, were blocked by armed pickets. It was impossible to get in or to get out.

During the night between July 5 and 6, Pope Pius VII faced a dilemma: either accept "spontaneously" the end of his temporal power, taking back the decrees he had issued, or submit to deportation. When the pope was given the order, Cardinals Pacca and Despuig were with him. Pius VII offered a complete refusal. The imperial response was condemnation to exile. The pope faced this with serenity and even with relief, since the deadlock of the preceding weeks had become unbearable.

These were epic events in the Catholic world. Bonaparte himself betrayed a certain anxiety, judging from the orders and counter orders that were issued regarding the fate of the pope. The emperor knew well the secret strength of the Church. Not by chance did he want to use this strength for his own cause.

Meanwhile in Rome and in the former Papal States, the imperial provisions came into force: an obligatory draft, requisitions and the swearing of fidelity to the new regime on the part of all those who received an income from the state or who exercised a governing role.

Don Francesco had continued to enlarge the manual of his sodality. He had composed fifteen short poems on the mysteries of the rosary. For example, here is the poem for the Agony in the Garden:

Prega nell'Orto	He prays in the Garden
e suda Sangue.	And sweats Blood.
Sospira e langue	He sighs and languishes
il mio Signor.	my Lord.
Offre al suo Padre	He offers to his Father
ostia gradita	a pleasing victim
anche la vita	and his life
per nostro amor.	out of love for us.

On March 15, 1810, Sister Agnese del Verbo Incarnato died. Don Francesco was at her side. How many times he had spoken with her about the Association, and how many times had they experienced ecstasy together, inebriated by the "sweetest Blood!" In their ecstasies, they had seen the devotion being spread over the face of the earth, as a "redeeming bath" and "priceless balm." He would have wished that the holy sister could rejoice with him as together they would see the glories of the devotion spread. He was consoled in knowing that in heaven she was able to intercede for the work and to guide it to the goals that she herself had predicted.

On May 23 his dear mother passed on to a better life. This event added sorrow upon sorrow. Two very dear women had left Albertini in such a short time. A great void had opened in the heart of Don Francesco.

His mother was seventy years old. He had always revered her as if she were a princess. He wanted to personally celebrate the funeral rites and have her present at Mass for the last time just as she had been every day during her life. With the people, he recited the rosary in the chapel of the Most Precious Blood where her body was displayed. Perhaps he also recited the little poem in which he expressed the drama of Mary in the loss and finding of Jesus:

Veggo Maria	I see Maria
che sospirando	who is sighing
va ricercando	and searching for
il caro ben.	her dear good [son].
E nel trovarlo,	And in finding him,
Figlio, gli dice,	Son, she says to him,
or son felice	now I am happy,
torna al mio sen.	come back to my bosom.

Many times during the funeral, he had to interrupt himself because he would burst into tears. This was a noble act, for Jesus also cried for his friend Lazarus and for Jerusalem. The separation, even though temporary when seen through the eyes of faith, still left him feeling the void. Faith and the certainty of eternal life did not relieve him of the sorrow over the loss of someone who was so important a part of his life.

Although deprived of his mother, Mariangela was still close to him. Now in heaven she was fulfilling the meaning of her name: "Mary" and "Angel."

"Having dealt with all earthly affection," wrote Don Giovanni Merlini, "Francesco now turned wholeheartedly to seeking the way to unite himself more closely with his God." He vowed to work "for the greater glory" of the Lord. This intention signified a relationship more passionate, if that were possible, with the dear neighbor.[5] The spirituality of the Most Precious Blood demanded this. God had so loved the world that he sent his Son. The Son had so loved the Father that he said: "Here I am, send me." Christ had so loved the world that he gave his Blood "even to the last drop."

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[5] The expression, "the dear neighbor," became a key theme in the spirituality of St. Maria De Mattias, foundress of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ.

Chapter 13
THE REVELATORY EXILE

As an eminent priest in that Roman neighborhood, as dean of all the clergy and recognized as a deeply spiritual man, Don Francesco played an important role in the dramatic period of French occupation and the suppression of the temporal power of the papacy. Even within the Church, there were those who exaggerated the merits of Napoleon and who maintained that what was important was the freedom to profess the faith, and the emperor had fully guaranteed that. To those who came to him for counsel, Albertini would reply clearly that there was one flock and one shepherd. The sheep must recognize the voice of the shepherd and follow him wherever he goes. The faithful could not dissociate themselves from the pope and pretend to remain faithful.

Albertini believed that priests in particular were to be guided by the great shepherd and, at the same time, were shepherds themselves, with duties toward their sheep. For priests it was a grave duty to behave as did the great Shepherd, to be an example to the people.

Many rumors were circulating. If, as seemed probable, the rule of Napoleon would last a long time, and given that refusing the oath would mean exile, this posed a problem. How could priests leave Christian people without the sacraments? Some proposed the possibility of taking an oath with some kind of mental reservation, adding a silent rider to the pledge of fidelity to Napoleon: "in everything that is not contrary to the law of God." There was a rumor of the existence of an "abbreviated" formula that, it was said, even Pius VII had approved.

Steadfast from the outset, Don Francesco was unmovable to the end. He maintained a stern refusal because he considered

taking an oath to a usurper has an intrinsic defect: it leads one to recognize the right of the usurper and render him legitimate.

There was a rumor that Pius VII had replied to the French who had asked him to align himself with Napoleon: "I cannot, I must not, and I will not." According to Albertini, this had to be the response of all Catholics called to swear the oath. That was his response when, in the middle of June 1810, he was called to sign the declaration of fidelity to the emperor. I cannot, I must not, and I will not!

One can imagine that the thought of leaving Rome during this delicate period was deeply distressing to Albertini. On July 1, 1810, twenty days after refusing to swear the oath, Don Francesco called Gaspar to preach some short, moving sermons (*fervorini*) for the Chaplet during the Mass of General Communion at San Nicola in Carcere. The young priest did so "with great power and unction." He had also replied: "*Non posso, no debbo, non voglio!*" "I cannot, I must not, I will not!" Don Gaspar and Don Francesco together awaited their punishment. They knew well that their sentence would be exile.

They spoke at length in those days of their prospects and of the fate of their projects in Rome, which for the moment were independent. Albertini was sure that they would have contact with one another in the future. Don Gaspar was struck by Albertini's conviction. Neither of them liked the thought of leaving Rome, but for both it was a comfort to see the possibility of facing the unknowns of exile together. Don Francesco knew that he would be able to continue cultivating the garden, and Gaspar would enjoy the reassuring presence of a father.

Two weeks later, on July 5, the two departed together. They were to travel to Piacenza. Finding themselves in the same coach was hardly a surprise. The journey and its organization and even the related costs were the responsibility of the condemned. The

police limited themselves to controlling the prisoners' movements. The group had been arranged. It was a comfort for Gaspar's parents to know that their dear son was with Albertini, and they entrusted Gaspar to him.

Scarcely had the carriage begun to move than Don Francesco began to comfort his traveling companions. He said that the hardships would not last forever and that everything would be for the glory of God. With his contagious optimism he sustained the mood of his companions.

The Via Cassia was a succession of tortuous ups and downs[2]. Albertini had many copies of the Chaplet with him and distributed them freely along the route. He acted as though Providence had organized the trip for this very purpose. He was convinced that the Church would regain peace and strength from the Blood of Christ.

As proof that the new devotion was in touch with the spirituality of the epoch, the little volume sold very well among the nobility as well as among the common people. Albertini was already thinking about reprinting them. In Florence, he spoke with Abbot Consalvo Petrai and got more than he asked for, because that learned and holy priest began to print and distribute the Chaplets.

The deportees reached Piacenza on the evening of July 15. As they stepped down from the carriage they did not know where to go. They knocked on the door of an inn that resembled those that were well known in the Piazza Montanara. It was neither better nor worse than those in which they had been spending their nights. They were dirty hovels that grew dark at a certain hour. One choked on the mixed smells coming from the kitchen and the cesspool. They ate something and then retired to a room where they would sleep, fully clothed, on straw mattresses.

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[2] The Via Cassia was one of the ancient Roman consular roads linking Rome with Tuscany. It ends in Florence where it merges with the Via Aurelia.

They were very tired and dazed by days of travel. After giving thanks to God for the strength that He was giving them, they abandoned themselves to sleep. In the pitch darkness they suddenly heard the muffled cry of Albertini. It seemed as though someone was choking him. They all cried out that they needed a light. When the innkeeper arrived with the candle, they discovered that a mouse had entered Albertini's mouth, probably in search of the cheese that the poor man had eaten at dinner. Fortunately Don Francesco was able to pull the intruder out by the tail and throw him to the floor. It was not an auspicious beginning to their stay in Piacenza, but Don Francesco, to encourage his companions, joked about it: "I guess I'm just a sewer!"

The following day they found more adequate quarters. For eight scudi a month they were housed in the rectory of San Matteo.

Beyond the confines of the Papal States, some of the clergy could not understand the significance of the choice that had been made by the exiles. Those who were not citizens of the Papal States were authorized to swear fidelity to Napoleon according to the existing concordats between France and the Holy See, even if these were obtained by coercion. It seemed a small point that the criterion would not apply to the subjects of the pope as well.

The people, however, recognized that subtle difference. They sympathized with those who were persecuted by Napoleon. They considered them heroes, in contrast with those priests who were inclined to applaud the patron of the moment in order to save their privileges.

Gaspar was in poor health and in September grew worse. He could not keep food down. He was judged to be near death. He was also convinced of this and prepared for the great step, asking for the Viaticum from his spiritual support, Albertini.

Albertini continued to encourage his disciple. He had

a certain confidence that Gaspar would recover, because in his heart the prophecy of Sister Maria Agnese was very much alive. Nevertheless, confronted with the worsening situation, he began to think that his young disciple was on a journey to another and better destination. Gaspar's exile seemed to be over and he was about to reach his homeland. Albertini administered the Viaticum to Gaspar. At the same time, with a confidence and hope against all the odds, he offered him encouragement. He invited him to commend himself to Saint Aloysius Gonzaga and to Saint Francis Xavier. He said that perhaps the illness was not to the death but was for the glory of God. He was not about to dismiss Sister Maria Agnese's promise.

Gaspar recovered. This was quite unexpected and was the supernatural seal that Don Francesco was waiting for. From that moment he had no more doubts about the words of Sister Maria Agnese. Don Gaspar would be the champion he was seeking, the intrepid apostle of the Confraternity of the Most Precious Blood. Now that God had given approval, Don Francesco had to support the divine project: he had to place himself at the service of his Gaspar, his disciple.

At Piacenza the Chaplet was as popular as it had been in Florence and Rome. Some high-ranking families, on learning that a reprint was being undertaken in Florence, proposed publishing editions of the Chaplet in various languages. Albertini could not have wished for more. Napoleon's strategy, after his marriage to the daughter of the emperor of Austria, had created a new European Christian world. Northern Italy bristled with French soldiers and functionaries with their families and with Polish and Austrian military. The humble Confraternity of San Nicola in Carcere was profiting from this circumstance to spread its own branches through the world, in the name of a sign that expressed universal unity so very well: the unique Blood of redemption. The

Blood was the universal word that spoke to everyone.

Meanwhile the city began to fill up with exiles. The local clergy were in a bad humor as the number of exiles grew since the people demonstrated a preference for the exiled priests. The bishop asked the French police to make some kind of provision for the exiles, and he was able to send some of them to the diocese of Bologna. This took place at the end of November.

Albertini and del Bufalo were part of the contingent destined for relocation. They reached Bologna during the first days of December 1810. They took lodging in the house of the Oratorians. In Bologna, it was like breathing the air of Rome. Nicknamed both "the learned" and at the same time "the fat," the city truly was a combination of both qualities. As in Rome and its talking statues, Bolognese satire was well developed[3].

This was evident in a satirical invitation issued in early January 1811, noting that, "some Ladies belonging to the *Società del Casino* (literally, "the Society of the Brothel")," asked and obtained "permission to meet" on the occasion of the carnival in the house of the Chiesa family (the "Church family") "to hold eight private dances, with the attendance of those Gentlemen whom it pleased them to invite." This episode that attests to the fun-loving nature of the people of Bologna, given that they would jokingly use names like "Casino" or "Chiesa" (which mean *brothel* and *church* respectively) as the fictitious names of a society or as a family surname.

Bologna was not only a city of epicurean excess. As in Rome, there was also an authentic spiritual life and attachment to religion.

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[3] Bologna has been called "la Dotta," or "the learned [city]," because of its venerable university. It is also famous for being a center of the culinary arts, hence "la Grassa," "the fat [city]." The so-called talking statues of Rome are treated in chapter 1.

A very pious noble lady, Caterina of the family of the Counts Bentivoglio, married to a member of the Orsi family, wanted to lead a life of perfection and was looking for a capable spiritual director. The fame of Don Francesco Albertini had spread through correspondence among the upper-class families and had preceded him to Bologna. She sought Don Francesco immediately so that she could have a conversation with him.

She was fascinated by Albertini's spiritual energy, and he in turn was impressed with the radical way in which she intended to consecrate herself to the Lord. It was another life-giving encounter. Caterina proposed that Albertini move to her house. It was a good idea that would solve many problems, but it created a dilemma. She, who was preparing herself to become the "firstborn daughter," was forcing the founder of the Confraternity to separate himself from his "firstborn son." Unfortunately there was no room for Gaspar, but she was able to house him with one of her servants who lived across the street.

In the house of the Contessa, Don Francesco Albertini had a way to lay out to his penitent the projects that had consumed him for months. Albertini's projects appeared to coincide miraculously with those of Caterina, who, in her desire for perfection, wanted to consecrate herself to good works, in particular, to helping the sick. It was an aspect of the spirituality of the Blood of Christ. In caring for the sick there is a witness of love for the needy person. The healthy person bends down to the sick one, to place his or her own strength at the disposition of the other, as Christ did with his Blood.

There was another reason that Albertini's involvement with Caterina was timely. For Albertini, humility, or the love of humble things (*filotapinosi),* was the foundation of every spiritual edifice. If that "daughter" of his was going to establish an institute of the Most Precious Blood dedicated to the care of the sick, she would

have to be well versed in such a virtue. Coming as she did from the upper class she might need an additional dose of self-denial.

Don Francesco did not leave Rome with a heart free of earthly affection. He had lost his father and mother, but his sister Elisabetta and two nieces remained, and he was very attached to them. There were also the parishioners, his religious sisters, and a multitude of penitents and poor people who had recourse to him each day. He carried all of them in his heart, and some of them received letters from Don Francesco that were laden with emotion. His time in Bologna was saddened by the news of the death of his sister Elisabetta. He wrote his two nieces consoling letters and invited Gaspar to add his own words of comfort in them.

Gaspar had also left behind some people dear to him: his father and mother, his sister-in-law and a niece. His mother was seriously ill. He had also left behind a number of apostolic works to which he was quite attached. His mother's last words had been: "My dear son, we will see one another in paradise." That phrase was like a nail driven into the head of the young priest. Would he never again see the face of "the incomparable mother?"

Don Francesco was thinking about Rome and his Association, and he was able to give it his attention even better in Bologna. He was with his "children," Gaspar and Caterina, who were destined in his mind to give life to the two future branches of the Confraternity. Albertini had begun to envision a female branch of the Confraternity, of sisters dedicated to the care of the sick. He likewise had in mind a male branch of priest missionaries. He organized the life of the Bentivoglio house like a religious community: there were times for prayer, for meditation, and for conferences on the development of the Confraternity. The Chaplet was recited frequently. Every day Don Francesco gave some points for reflection, tasking the Countess with recording them. The theme was the virtue of holy humility.

On October 20, 1811, Gaspar's mother died. The notice was communicated to Albertini so that he could break the news gently to his spiritual son. Don Francesco gathered with his disciple in prayer, and in the atmosphere of prayer he communicated the terrible news.

It was a heavy blow for the young priest, who broke into tears. He expected her death, but a mother is a mother after all. Don Francesco could understand this. He had also lost beloved members of his own family, including his dear mother.

In June, one of the priests in exile took the oath. The revolt organized against him by his companions was such that he had to "hide himself during the few days that preceded his departure" from Bologna. When he arrived back in Perugia, he received a letter from his fellow citizens, inviting him not to come home. They did not want him since he seemed to lack moral fiber.

On June 19, the authorities carried out a search for some of those deported and the arrest of others among the more noted opponents. At first, Albertini's name did not appear. Between July and August, however, he ended up on a list of seventeen individuals "whose conduct was the most observable" – that is, the most open to censure. The note was sent to the viceroy, who considered it necessary to punish the more stubborn among them as an example to the others.

On October 2, the prefect gave orders to the chief of police who, on November 11, was to send back a list of the Roman priests who would be candidates for a harsher punishment, "having pointed out their despicable political conduct, which was confirmed by the information obtained by means of the Vicar General." Among these was Albertini.

The priests on the list were described as "dangerous on account of their discourses against the Government, habitually speaking to the discredit of our Clergy and dissuading their

companions to take the obligatory oath of fidelity." The punishment threatened was exile in Corsica.

The problem of the costs of the journey arose, "considering that the greater number of them would not be able to bear the costs on their own." They needed to know if the deportees were to travel to Corsica on their own or accompanied by an escort. In the first case passports would be needed. The director general of police did not have "such instructions to be able to verify the four questions" of the prefect. He requested information from the viceroy.

The response arrived on November 28. The estimated cost of the trip was eighty francs. The sum was to be consigned to each. In all, the operation would cost eight hundred francs. In order not to increase the cost, the priests were to travel unescorted, with a simple expulsion order (*foglio di via*). They were to embark at Bastia. The prefecture of Bologna was to come to an understanding or agreement with the prefect of the Mediterranean whose office was in Livorno.

Don Francesco departed on December 28, 1811, with the second contingent of five individuals. Almost certainly on that occasion he sent his "dearest son" this flowing poem:

Figlio mio che bel diletto	My son how greatly
Tu sei tutto di Gesù	You are favored by Jesus
Brugia dunque del suo affetto	Burn with his affection
Per te il mondo non è più	For you the world is no more
Nel suo Cuore ti metto	I place you in his Heart
Che per te trafitto fu	That was pierced for you
Sarà dunque il tuo ricetto	He will thus be your refuge
Quaggiù in terra e colassù.	Here on earth and in heaven above.

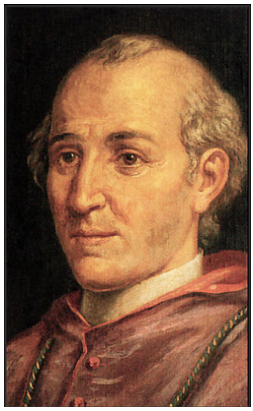
The poem reveals the painful nature of the separation. Each of them tried to lessen the weight of the separation for the other. It was not a question of pretence: it was sincerity based on love. To cover pain with a smile, to alleviate pain for the other, is one of the great marks of love. Some even manage to smile to the bystanders at the point of death so as not to sadden them with this forced parting.

Albertini's feelings on leaving Bologna for Corsica could not be the same that he had revealed some months before in a letter: "Come whatever may come. Let happen whatever will happen, it is enough that I be on the side of our good God and nothing will frighten me. Everything is sweet and pleasing with his grace. Even if they take me to the farthest limits of the sea and to the ends of the earth, would I not find God there? And when I am under him I can lack nothing. Oh that heaven would grant that I be able to suffer something for the divine glory! But my most grievous sins do not merit such an honor. Enough. I will quote the words of the Canaanite woman when she addressed Jesus Christ: 'Lord, even the dogs are given the crumbs that fall from the table of their masters'."

His heart of flesh would have wished to remain near his son. Every father on earth is also a son. The true Father, who is in heaven, the Father of all, had arranged the separation. The heavenly Father knew very well what was needed.

The straw that is chewed and later reduced to manure makes the earth fertile; the straw that is whole and bright as gold gets in the way. Don Francesco aspired to be the manure in the field of the Lord. He would be trodden upon on the path and would be discarded so that every blade of grass would flourish and every ear of grain be full. There was joy in parting even as he shed tears over the separation.

An 18th century map that shows the location of the Piazza Montanara in Rome, where Don Francesco was born and raised.



The Life of Francesco Albertini

Buskers in the Piazza Montanara added to its lively atmosphere.

A 19th century photograph of people in the Piazza Montanara.

A public scribe in the Piazza Montanara. A scribe prepared documents for people who were often illiterate.

The Church of San Nicola in Carcere, at the time of Albertini, above, and in present-day Rome, below.

A present-day photograph of Bastia, Corsica, where Don Francesco Albertini was imprisoned.

Albertini and St. Gaspar were in exile in the Palazzo Bentivolgio Orsi, shown here in a present-day photograph.

An 18th-century engraving of the Piazza Montanara, where Albertini returned after his exile.

Chapter 14
BASTIA, CORSICA

The journey of Don Francesco and his companions from Bologna to Livorno lasted exactly a week, including a stop of two and half days in Florence. Tuscany – at least in the judgment of Grand Duchess Elisa Bonaparte – was teeming with priests. She called them "black crows." She was annoyed with them, knowing that they were adversaries of her brother. She wrote to the prefect of Bologna to stop the deportation. Didn't he realize that if he rid himself of the hated "birds," he would allow them to fly back to their nest? This would happen sooner or later, but Elisa did not know this.

Livorno had traditions and laws of free exchange. The port was among the busiest of the Mediterranean. In the recent past monopolistic corporations run by the "rabble" (*plebaglia*) had been established, which had caused some memorable conflicts. By 1795 things were quiet, but the events following the French Revolution and the Napoleonic campaigns had made the maritime port very important, and the conflicting powers had set their sights on it. The emperor had taken possession of Livorno in December 1807. He had elevated the city to be the seat of one of the prefects of the Mediterranean and had assigned the departments of Tuscany to his sister Maria Anna Bonaparte, called Elisa, already princess of Lucca and Piombino and now a grand duchess.

The brig carrying Albertini and nine other priests set sail and headed directly to Bastia on Corsica on January 3, 1812. The cold was biting, but the air and the water were calm. Francesco's heart was also calm, and he cheered the others of the group with his contagious effervescence. "We have the privilege of suffering something for the Lord!" he would say

with joyful spirit. And immediately he would add, correcting himself: "But what suffering? It is an unspeakable joy!"

Many exiles were already on the island, and others were awaiting departure in Livorno and in the other ports of the Tyrrhenian Sea. The ship was sailing cautiously. A schooner went ahead of the brig and was reconnoitering in order to spot any English ships or pirates. The route usually hugged the coast of the islands so as to reach shelter as quickly as possible in case of danger.

Don Francesco had never before sailed on a ship. He had observed the small boats in the port of Ripetta on the Tiber, but they were different. Seeing the billowing of the sails, the rigging, and the bustling of the crew made him stand in wonder. These men scampered along the ropes like spiders in a web. It was a new world, and it could not but stir in him reflections worthy of his namesake and teacher Francis De Sales.

Albertini did not have the least doubt that God would triumph, bringing good out of evil. The winds and the sea did not obey Napoleon, and neither did the ship or the ice of the steppes of Russia. The French Revolution had revealed to men and women the power of the Blood of Christ even as they pitilessly shed human blood. This had rekindled a religious spirit even while the Revolution was bent on extinguishing it completely. Napoleon, while tormenting the world with the founding of a human kingdom, would give new life to the Kingdom or Reign of God, just as the Church emerged from the ruins of the pagan empire in Rome thanks to the blood of the martyrs.

Corsica was the homeland of Napoleon, who was born there in 1769, a year before Albertini. The island was ceded to France by Genoa and had been contested in the course of its history. In more recent times, the English and French had fought over it. Corsica was solidly in the French hands, but the sailors on

watch were scanning the horizon for enemy ships. Corsica may have belonged to France, but the Mediterranean that surrounded the island belonged to England.

The port of Bastia was small and not suited for ships of great tonnage, and was blocked by a curious rock formation. The rock was streaked with lichens, and was called "the Lion" because of its supposed resemblance to a lion in repose. It posed a danger for boats, which often suffered gashes to their hulls if they scraped against it. The lichens draped over the "neck" gave the appearance of a lion's mane. Only once they had entered the port would sailors appreciate the usefulness of the rocks because they formed a barrier to the waves when the north winds blew.

The town offered a beautiful panoramic view of the sea. An amphitheater formed by the houses rose gently from the edge of the water to the base of a steep mountain. The populated area was surrounded by olive and orange trees and was surmounted by the citadel, which formed a second city, topped by a fort called the Donjon. The old port was dominated by the church of San Giovanni Battista. Two bell towers stood guard like two gendarmes.

The brig lay before the port the morning of January 4. The arrival of each ship was awaited by a small crowd because ships brought news of the world. On the mole, the newly arrived were given a festive welcome by the local clergy, by the deportees who were already on the island and by the crowd. Don Francesco in particular was "welcomed with much applause by the good ecclesiastics and by the prelates" who had preceded them to Bastia. "All gave them the greatest assurances of cordiality."

The troops of occupation had problems with the people of the island. The former, moreover, were hardly motivated to carry out the thankless task of repression. They were Croatians taken prisoner by Napoleon, transferred to Corsica and forced to

serve their enemy. A group of locals who supported the exiles had been formed in Bastia, led by the Terriggi family. Besides their faith, the impatience of the islanders with the French occupation contributed to the formation of this group.

The deportees were led to the *Mairie*, the city palace, to be registered and advised of the terms of their exile. They were then invited to find lodging at their own expense. The terms of their exile contained a code of conduct. They were not to attempt escape, because a single attempt would mean that all would end up in the prison of the Donjon. They were not to enter into political debate either among themselves or with the locals. For those who violated the code the threat was expulsion from Bastia. This would be a nightmare for the exiles, because the city was universally famous for "the pleasantness of manners and open sociality," in contrast to other cities on the island.

The exiles were sought after by the families. This was motivated in part by their solidarity with and esteem for the heroism of the exiles, but also because the rent would guarantee an income to a meager family budget. Rent alone would be about eleven francs a month and did not include meals, but did include lamps or candles and towels. Then there was the washerwoman and shoemaker to be paid. The deportees were transformed into a resource for the inhabitants of the island. The only restriction for the exiles was that they had to present themselves to General Choiré at the police station every Friday to sign the register.

The priests, besides residing freely with private families or in parishes, could hold classes and celebrate Mass. In this way they added to the allotment that the government gave them. If they were lodged with a family, they could even go along with them for a few days of holiday. Unfortunately we do not know the identity of the family with whom Don Francesco found lodging. The news that he sent back to his family was triumphal but vague. He was

doing very well. Everything was good and beautiful. The Lord could not have distributed his graces more generously.

A week after arriving in Corsica, Albertini wrote of the journey in a letter to his nephew and confided to him that his heart was serene. "I find myself in perfect health, happy and tranquil and full of joy. I urge that all join with me in thanking the Lord who through the merits of his precious Blood has deigned to have me take part in this small suffering for his divine glory, if indeed it can be called suffering, while I tell you sincerely with my heart on my lips, in just reflecting that I find myself here for the glory of my Jesus, my spirit is overwhelmed by such joy that I have no words that can explain this to you."

Sometime later Don Francesco Pacini arrived in Bastia. As soon as Albertini saw him, "he embraced him happily and joyfully." Seeing his friend Pacini depressed, Don Francesco offered him encouragement and infused "in his heart sentiments of religion," communicating to him "a staunch comfort."

The oldest part of the city was enclosed by walls and bastions, but a large suburban area extended around the city. The narrow streets seemed even narrower because of the tall houses. According to the census of 1811 there were 8,100 souls in the city. The face of the city was mainly Italian, as was its language.

In Bastia the Carnival started in late January. There were parties at night. On February 9, Forty Hours began in the Oratory of the Crucified. There were three hours of exposition in the morning and three in the afternoon. It was made all the more solemn by the presence of more than 200 priests in the city.

The days were alternately inclement, serene, or cloudy. It rained often. From time to time winds of the sirocco would blow. One could not guess what clothes might be needed. It was not a problem for Albertini, who had only one set of clothes.

What sense was there in this segregation of priests? So

many priests were now "loafing" in Bastia, while in Rome so many initiatives were in danger of languishing? One had to ask Divine Providence, but Don Francesco trusted. "He knows more than we do," he would say.

He did not forget his friends, his penitents and, above all, his creation, the Association or Confraternity. The parish of San Nicola was also well represented in Bastia. With him were Don Francesco Maria Pitorri and Don Francesco Baronci. It was as if they were at home and their conversations regularly centered on life in the Piazza Montanara.

When he learned that some new disagreements had arisen in the Association, he wrote to the secretary: "Oh, dear God! How is this happening? At the very time in which devotion to the Most Precious Blood of our Divine Redeemer, from which comes everything that is good, is gaining a footing and sending out its own roots!" How was it possible that a structure destined to be "the rootstock of a beautiful plant in paradise" was "subject to storms that threatened to uproot it?"

He attributed the "horrible storms to the infernal enemy, who would never tolerate the spread of the devotion to and love for a Blood from which the entire world receives its salvation and defeats the demon." To conquer Satan – as Albertini the exorcist well knew – one needed "zeal, patience and humility." "Be happy," he said to the secretary, "and be affectionately devoted to the Most Precious Blood of our redeemer Jesus, which is the only thing that can placate the wrath of the Eternal Father."

On May 27, 1812, a notice was issued that threatened the confiscation of goods from those who had not sworn the oath. The directive was dated May 4 and allowed until June 4 for a decision. June 4 passed without any further news. Only on June 10 were letters sent, ordering the deportees to assemble. The deadline was put off for all of July. Evidently the mood of the deportees did

not give much hope that they would give in, and the authorities wanted to avoid making a bad impression.

The new orders warned: "The deadline is up and whoever does not swear the oath will be arrested and imprisoned." The authorities were confident of the effectiveness of the threat, but the solidarity of the populace with the exiles was growing daily.

During the night, sixteen deportees fled to Sardinia, which had remained independent under the house of Savoy and was protected by the English navy. This annoyed the police. On July 13 all of the deportees were rounded up and had to present themselves to the authorities. The mayor, the commandant of the piazza and the colonel of the police spoke in quite severe terms. Now the exiles had to sign in at the *Scannio* (literally, "bench") in the prefecture of police every day and not only on Fridays as they had in the past. A simple trip into the suburbs would be considered an escape. Within a day each would have to notify the family with whom they were living of the new orders.

The *Scannio*, in the judgment of Don Giovanni Battista Loberti, resembled the bench of the public scribe of the Piazza Montanara. It made such an impression on him that he shared this with Albertini, who had passed the bench in the Piazza Montanara every day. The scribe of Bastia was also under a portico with his little bench. He recorded that they were present. The deportees would go to him daily to give their names. At the end of the month there was a loosening of the restrictions and the obligation ceased.

The ultimatum of the end of July also passed without consequences. Whoever would ask would be given the response that an additional ten days had been granted and then a military commission would be formed. On Saturday, August 8, they were notified that on the following day they all had to be in the plaza of the citadel by 8 o'clock. It was the great day of judgment.

The next day the mass of deportees was received within the

citadel. They passed before the authorities, each giving his name. Once all had been identified, a summary of a letter of General Berthier was read. He gave them 24 to 48 hours to profess the oath. After the deadline passed, those who obstinately refused would be declared "rebels and prisoners." Whoever did not wish to swear had to explain his reasons in writing. Colonel Pianelli, a cynical and sarcastic man, finally said: "Swear, swear! You will go to paradise all the same."

Now the priests then had to find a cell in which to stay. They were gruffly told: "Latecomers will get the worst rooms" (*Chi tardi arriva, male allogia*). The guards wanted to enjoy watching the scramble that occurred, and they even spurred on the quarrelling among the priests as they sought the best lodging. In truth there was little to quarrel about. Even those who arrived first got poor lodging. There was really nothing for anyone. In his humility Albertini echoed the sentiments of the psalmist: "If you are with me, Lord, what can a human being do to me?" (cf. Psalm 118: 6).

It was very hot, the bugs were unending, and the smell permeated the place. Some cells lacked a window, and each cell housed up to fourteen "guests." The following day the prisoners protested the overcrowding. Doctors judged that the arrangement risked the outbreak of an epidemic. The people of Bastia were in solidarity with the deportees; perhaps it was in part to take advantage of having paying guests in their homes, but their compassion was also undeniable. To relieve the tension, the people were permitted to enter the fortress and nearly all the city came in a kind of pilgrimage, with various kinds of food, some of which was a gift and some for sale.

After a few days, they were permitted two hours of air in the evening, from 5 until 7. Some priests were authorized to return to private homes for health reasons. The people of Bastia,

thinking that this concession resulted from the priests taking the oath, met those poor exiles with insults and stopped only when the misunderstanding was cleared up. The next day they were granted four hours of air in the morning in addition to the two in the afternoon. The morning hours, from 6 until 10, were also slated for the celebration of Masses in the two churches of the fortress: the parish of Santa Maria and the oratory of the Crucified. In the two places there was an incredible gathering.

To improve the housing in the fortress, about sixty of the prisoners were invited to the convent of the Blue Nuns, so called on account of the color of their religious habits. Albertini was among those who remained at the Donjon.

The prison regime was particularly hard for him with his single set of clothing. While living with a family, he washed his clothes in the evening, and in the morning they were generally ready to wear. In prison this was not possible, and there was no other solution than to wear the same clothes every day.

That set of clothes, worn for who knows how long, began to become indecent and smelly. His companions, embarrassed, encouraged one another to suggest to Don Francesco to change his clothes.

Don Pacini carried out the delicate mission. He proposed that Don Francesco get a new set of clothes and that he throw away the ones he had on. He did not have the courage to point out the smell. Pacini's intervention was fruitless.

Only Monsignor Gianfrancesco Falzacappa succeeded in getting something done. Albertini accepted some assistance from him. Don Francesco was given a little money. This did not change the situation much, because the money ended up in the pockets of

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[1] This religious order is formally known as the Sisters of the Most Holy Order of the Annunciation. They are a contemplative order founded in Genoa in the early seventeenth century.

others whom Albertini deemed needier.

Falzacappa was well aware of the virtue of the canon of San Nicola and was among those who had taught his companions in prison to move beyond the clothing. There was no one who doubted the sanctity of Don Francesco. The unconditional admirers would say: "The body stinks but the soul is fragrant." Those who were puzzled by the situation turned the sentence around: "The soul is fragrant but the body stinks."

Among those who held Albertini in great esteem were Don Anselmo Basilici, Don Eugenio Pechi, Don Vincenzo Annovazzi, Don Gabriele Gasparri and Don Carlo Lattanzi. Don Francesco Pacini, his old schoolmate, was also among those who admired Albertini.

On August 18, after days of rumors, there was a sudden turn of events. The gate of the fortress was shut and no one could leave. If someone had ordered his lunch from outside, he had to go to the gate to get it through a small hole. Letters had to be given unsealed to the commandant, who would send them on after checking the content. There was a rumor that there would be a mass deportation to Toulon or Morocco. Some even maintained that they might end up in America. "From shore to shore until death" was their motto.

Talk of such deportation was not grounded in reality, because sailing on the Mediterranean was very dangerous. Piracy was rampant and British ships were a threat. Transferring the deportees to Morocco or to America would require mobilizing an armed fleet.

The restrictions forced the deportees to eat the meals that were cooked at the fortress. They were cheap but the quality was terrible. It was of no use to send the bowls of the awful food to the commandant, so that he would be aware of the situation and do something about it. The repugnant food became part of the tactic

of harassment. It seems that the cook may have been commanded to make a show of disgusting behavior. He was seen washing his feet in the soup kettle!

Life assumed a communal rhythm, with moments of authentic good humor that alternated with quarreling. Forcing men of such diverse character into close quarters did not always help life in common. Evidence of this is found in the nicknames the prisoners gave their companions in misfortune. The person responsible for serving tables was called "the dirty waiter." He also washed himself in the kitchen pots, and it was fortunate he did not do anything worse. Those who never laughed were called "Heraclituses." The "Democrituses" on the other hand were always laughing[2]. The gloomy and melancholy were dubbed "the dark ones" (*Negri*). Those who would look on the bright side of things, also those who were more accommodating, were designated as the "Rejoicers."

Don Gisueppe Canali, who informs us of these goings on, located himself among the Rejoicers. And to which category did Albertini belong? Canali does not say directly, but he probably is referring to Albertini when he wrote: "The more sensible of our companions were opposed to these humorous antics. With charity, with calm reasoning, and with skill, they maintained concord and unity. The odd behavior of their companions gave them material for a bit of humor and laughter, but without hurting any of them in the process."

Prison life led to a certain solidarity. A common petty cash fund was created, and about six hundred francs a month flowed into it. At first Monsignor Tommaso Arezzo, titular bishop of Seleucia and pro-vicar of Rome and one of those who

[2] Heraclitus and Democritus were Greek philosophers. The former was sometimes known as the "weeping philosopher" because of his pessimistic views, while the latter was known as the "laughing philosopher."

had succeeded in escaping to Sardinia on November 28, 1812, administered the fund. Later it was managed by the highest ranking prelate.

The fortress cook became more and more a problem. One time a mouse and a nest of little mice were found in the soup. As soon as this became known everyone who had eaten the soup threw it up. The meat that he prepared was regularly covered with flies both before and after it had been cooked. At last the soldiers, knowing that there were not two kitchens in the fortress, came to realize that their rations were cooked in the same way. The cook was fired.

On September 18, the commandant called four representatives from the convent of the Turchine or Blue Nuns and four from the Donjon. He read them a letter of General Berthier in which he deplored the obstinacy of the deportees. The general offered them two formulas for the oath: one, called the "ecclesiastic," which referred to the alleged concordat, and the other the "constitutional," the oath in its original form. Whoever would choose the former would return home with a pension, but without gaining possession of a benefice and without the hope of recovering any offices he had held. Whoever would choose the latter oath would be totally rehabilitated. The obstinate who would refuse either oath would go before the military commission.

The eight representatives said that they could adhere to neither oath. They were disposed to take the oath that was called "of the pope." The officer asked: "What's that?"

Don Francesco Serlupi had a copy of the oath in his pocket. He took it out and put it in from of the commandant. It said: "I promise and swear not to take part in any conspiracy, plotting or sedition against the present government, as I submit to it and obey in everything that is not contrary to the laws of God and of the Church." After reading it, the commandant said, "I don't like

it." Nevertheless he sent it to General Berthier. He believed that it would never be accepted, but he would wait to see what happened.

On September 26, at two in the afternoon, it was announced that General Luné was about to arrive. He wanted to speak to all the deported. Shortly afterward the beat of a drum sounded in the city in order to give notice to the priests who were staying in private homes with permission. At five o'clock even these had to appear in the courtyard of the Donjon with the others.

At six the roll call took place, and the special permission for the convalescents was withdrawn. Some deportees were missing. The military was informed that these were seriously ill. The order to return to the fortress admitted of no exceptions, the priests were told in reply. The military wanted all the deportees in the fortress. On October 1 three were still missing. There was a rumor that they were in hiding. Searches were made and the treatment of the prisoners became more harsh.

On October 22 the prisoners had to listen to a "sermon" by a Major Anglemann. He exhorted his hearers: "You are presumptuous and egotistical. You are presumptuous because you think that you alone can save yourselves. Perhaps all the priests of France and Italy who have sworn are going to hell? Even if this were true, you would be egotists because you want to appear better than the others. Take the oath! Commit this little sin and God will forgive you. Follow the counsel of the holy Fathers. What did John Chrysostom say? One must obey one's superiors even if sometimes they are rascals!"

Who knows where he scraped together these bits of knowledge of moral theology and knowledge of the Fathers of the Church? It was, however, a hopeless venture for a military man to convince an army of priests. He was informed that Chrysostom did not legitimize every kind of command. Finally he said that Saint

Jerome had formulated it better. The dispositions of legitimate authority were to be observed, provided that they contained nothing contrary to the laws of God. In the case of Napoleon and the Roman priests, then, the problem was also to know if this was a legitimate authority. Those who were asked to take the oath were subjects of the pope, who was also a temporal ruler.

Continuing his discourse, the major added some tempting words of a practical nature. Whoever would swear would leave immediately. He could travel around Corsica at will while awaiting the proper passport to go back to his country. Before obtaining the restoration of his rights, he would receive a stipend of thirty francs a month.

Anglemann was trying to be friendly. It seemed that he truly had the happiness of the poor prisoners at heart. He did receive a small reward for his efforts. He succeeded in breaking the spirit of two priests who took the oath after a week of inner struggle. They were Don Pietro Trovarelli, canon of the cathedral of Rieti, and Don Angelo Nardi, archpriest of the cathedral of Orte. The psychological pressure in those last days was strong, thanks to some dramatic rumors about their future, such as the forced conscription of the deportees for thirty years and their transfer to Saigon as chaplains for the workers there.

By now the defeat of Napoleon in Russia was public knowledge. Of the greatest army in history, six hundred thousand men, no more than a few thousand retreating soldiers remained. The cold of the steppe and the destruction of local resources had reduced this ambitious venture to dust. To compensate, it seems likely that the emperor wanted a diplomatic success and the support of religion. He needed a concordat with the pope.

The military commission began with much flag waving on November 2. Six deportees were led with an armed guard into the prefecture. They listened to the admonition of the general: the

advantages of capitulating and the disadvantages of remaining obdurate. All refused the oath. In a surprising turn of events, the general had the two who had taken the oath come in and then praised them in front of the six who had refused, giving them the promised rewards. The six "reprobates" were then led back to the Donjon with the usual guard. Shortly afterward the thunderbolts of the commission struck. They ordered a regimen of bread and water, strict isolation, and removal of the prisoners' lights and fire. Since it was clear that no one would take the oath, the military commission was suspended, and its members left the island.

On November 16 the work of the commission began anew. Monsignor Falzacappa and Monsignor Tiberi were brought to be judged. In the afternoon they were sent to Capraia on board the *La Mosca*.

The departure of the two prelates made Albertini's personal condition hopeless. After a few weeks his clothes began to fall to pieces. His appearance aroused pity. Lazarus in the gospel got on better. It had turned cold, and at times there were even some snowflakes. The peaks of the mountains surrounding Bastia were white with snow.

On December 1, it was time for another six, including Pitorri, to face their fate. After the interrogation they embarked for the island of Capraia. *La Mosca*, with its interminable coming and going, proved itself worthy of its name ("The Fly"): tedious, annoying and untiring.

Chapter 15
UNSHAKEABLE

On the morning of December 6, 1812, the cannons of the fortress fired blanks to mark the seventh anniversary of the victory at Austerlitz. New successes on the battlefield were not likely, so they had recourse to commemorating the glorious events of the past. The French wanted to continue living with the myth of an emperor who remained the master of the world even as he was losing battles.

That evening four deportees attempted to escape. They were captured on Tuesday, December 8, at an inn at San Nicolao. It was the feast of the Immaculate Conception and the anniversary of the founding of the Confraternity of the Most Precious Blood. The four were thrown into the terrible *tombeaux*, the punishment cells rightly called "the tombs."

The cells were little spaces carved from the rock in the basement of the fortress. They were damp and smelly. To gain access to them one had to descend a circular stairway with uneven steps. The cells received light and air from openings in the wall or in the vaulted ceiling. The worst prisoners were jailed there.

Frightened, the four who felt that they had been buried alive swore the oath and obtained immediate release from prison. Their capitulation was publicized widely and celebrated as a wise decision. These broken men received a very poor welcome when they returned to Bastia. No one supported those frightened prisoners, not even those who would have done worse under the same circumstances.

The little crack in the dam of refusal put the deportees into a bad mood. They protested the use of such methods of persecution. What was the value of an oath sworn in response to

intimidation? It would have no value for the one swearing the oath nor for the one to whom the oath was sworn.

The champion of this idea was Albertini, ever the persuader. For punishment, he and three others were sent to the tombs. The others were Don Rocco Carbone, canon of Santa Anastasia and secretary of the Vicariate; Don Onofrio del Sole, pastor of Santa Lucia dei Ginnasi; and the theologian of the Apostolic Datary, Don Francesco Rotati.[1] They entered the subterranean hell on December 9.

Two of the prisoners contracted a serious and violent illness. Fearing that they would die in prison, the doctors had them transferred to a hospital. Albertini and another prisoner were left in the tombs to rot.

On Christmas Eve, Albertini had a mystical experience that he recounted in a letter to one of his penitents: "It seemed that I found myself in the Grotto of Bethlehem, and there I saw the Holy Child, Mary most holy and Saint Joseph. Oh, my daughter, that night passed and I was not aware of it. It appeared that I enjoyed a taste of paradise." Albertini's statements are all the more surprising when one realizes that the water dripping from the underground walls collected on the floor and formed mud that reached to the middle of his ankles.

A protest was mounted in the city. Lady Maria, wife of Pietro Terriggi, head of the party opposing the French, was nicknamed *la Faccendiera* or "wheeler-dealer." She visited the prisoners often on one pretext or another. She looked after those who were sick with the help of some of her friends. Through her the exiles received news of the outside world, and the inhabitants of Bastia learned of what was happening at the fortress. Thanks to

[1] The priests were all from Rome. The first two mentioned were a canon and a pastor of two Roman churches and the third worked in a former Vatican congregation that managed benefices.

her, the priests who resisted more vigorously enjoyed popularity among the citizens. If a prisoner gave a few sharp responses to a guard, the story immediately made the rounds of the city to the evident delight of the people.

One day Cesare Terriggi, son of the *Faccendiera*, wanted to offer lunch to the detainees. The commandant stopped him. Cesare challenged the commandant to a duel. The latter refused to fight. From then on, the young man set out to injure his rival, accusing him of treachery. The priests went to great lengths to convince the young Teriggi that dueling was immoral. Why ruin a good intention with an evil action? The episode, however, revealed the proud Corsican spirit and the thin line between good and evil.

When the local populace learned from Maria Teriggi of the terrible confinement imposed on the two priests in the tombs, they gathered in revolt in front of the Donjon and forced the authorities to put the two indomitable priests back in their cells. Don Francesco emerged soiled with mud, hardly recognizable but serene. He had now become disgusting to look at, but admiration for him was growing. By now, nearly everyone looked beyond his appearance and appreciated the appeal of a man with a single set of clothes who managed to smile.

Someone cited the famous words of Isaiah the prophet: " ...many were astonished at him, his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the sons of men... he had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces... Surely he has borne our grief and carried our sorrows...upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed... Yet it was the will of the Lord to bruise him; he has put him to grief; when he makes himself an offering for sin" (cf. Is 53).

The police authorities finally announced that at the end of the year there would be a military commission of inquiry for all the prisoners. It was not convened. Now the rain and cold winds made living in Bastia very difficult. Unfortunately, Don Onofrio and Don Rocco, two companions of Albertini for a few days in the tombs, did not pull through. They died on January 15 and 16 of 1813, respectively. Albertini complained of nothing. He would play things down and sometimes he would let it slip that he already knew what would happen because of what he had been told by a sister of the Paolotte. "I will come out alive," he would say, "but first we must undergo many other bitter things. The triumph of the Most Precious Blood will be great."

Albertini's confidence stemmed from the assurance that Sister Maria Agnese had given him. That dear sister had not gone into great detail, however. He reflected on the few things that she had told him and came to the conclusion that if he was to promote the spread of the devotion to the Most Precious Blood, it was obvious that he could not die in Bastia. If he were to die now, his spiritual son, Don Gaspar, could not fulfill the mission to which he had been called. He had not revealed the mission to Gaspar yet. Now he had to finish Gaspar's education.

Don Francesco had caught a glimpse of greatness in the young man, great in spirit and in deeds, but Albertini had to intervene in some areas of his life. Gaspar, he thought, was too attached to his family, and he thought so highly of himself that it appeared to border on vainglory. Gaspar's gift for leadership was sometimes not sufficiently under control and that ended up annoying some of his less submissive companions. All this did not detract from the admiration that Albertini had for his disciple. Don Francesco would just have to continue to work with his protégé. It is even possible that Albertini offered the extraordinary mortifications he imposed upon himself to obtain from God the

"conversion" of his dear son, to whom he intended to hand over all of his projects.

On February 13, the emperor published an alleged concordat with the pope, called the Concordat of Fontainbleau, which was subsequently declared void by Pius VII. The news reached Bastia in the morning, along with a few copies of a newspaper from Florence. The news was received with jubilation, especially after the confirmation contained in a message from the archbishop of Pisa. The exiles embraced one another, shouting: "We are free! We are free!" The conditions of detention were eased, and the prisoners to leave the prison frequently. The permission for them to return to private lodging followed.

But on March 5, the prisoners were required to assemble in the courtyard of the Cittadella, at 5 in the afternoon. It was announced that there would they would have to gather for roll call every day at 6. From 10 to 11 the daily ration of bread would be distributed. The deportees, however, had to reimburse the prison administration for damages during the past months. These damages covered the removal of sheets, blankets and beds worth 500 francs. Some of the money would go to the Blue Nuns and the rest to the Donjon.

Is it possible that the priests were thieves? Apart from any moral considerations, it was impossible for them to steal these things since they could not be taken from the island. An investigation would surely prove their innocence.

The commandant rejected their line of reasoning and they had to pay. The damages were deducted from their subsidy.

On March 30, 1813, a dispatch from Milan announced an imperial decree ordering the restoration of property and the repatriation of all the refractory priests after they would take the required oath. The emperor considered this a mere formality in the light of the so-called concordat that had been rejected by the

pope. He set a deadline for May 1. Those who refused would be deprived of the "pardon" of the emperor. The message was read to the deportees on April 10. General Luné noted that the offices would remain open at the disposition of those who would want to swear the oath.

Someone asked: "With which formula is the oath to be taken?"

"The constitutional formula," replied the general.

It was not good news. The pope had never accepted the text of the constitutional or civic oath. Was it possible that he had given in now, with the imperial throne beginning to totter? Matters did not stand as Napoleon would have them believe. No one swallowed the bait.

On April 15, while the detainees of Bastia (now numbering more than two hundred) were gathered in the courtyard to receive their rations, they were forced to listen to the commandant of the fortress relaying a message of General Berthier, the supreme commander of the forces of the island. Among other things, the message said: "those who obstinately persist in not taking the oath would be considered to be rebels against the Holy Father, their spiritual leader. They are responsible before God, before humanity, and religion for whatever might happen to them. The Gospel commands fidelity to the Sovereign and now conscience cannot excuse, because there is an agreement between the emperor and the pope."

It was Holy Thursday. The prisoners were being asked to celebrate the institution of the priesthood in very peculiar way. No one gave in, even if the detainees were surrounded by police and led from the prefecture to the Donjon into the tombs, "as if stacked one on top of the other." Such treatment had to be the fruit of exasperation and nervousness on the part of the military.

The horror of the place and its unhealthy air became

even more noxious because so many persons were crowded into such a small site. They prepared themselves for martyrdom by confessing to one another. Meanwhile, lunch was served amid an indescribable confusion, because there was hardly enough room to move. A sickening odor spread over the food.

In Bastia, revolt began to spread. The leading citizens and the agitation of the entire city gave even the least religious doctors the courage to protest, declaring the living conditions of the heroic resisters to be inhumane. They add that the situation of the detainees could result in a deadly epidemic affecting everyone. This induced the commandant, who could not count on an adequate and trustworthy force, to extract the priests from the tombs and relocate them, some in the Donjon and some with the Blue Nuns.

On April 16, Good Friday, they had to assemble again. Their captors addressed them in angry tones. Don Francesco Donati, Don Francesco Gentilini and the general of the Conventual Franciscans, Father Giuseppe Maria De Bonis, responded in the name of all. They said that the exiles were not being stubborn. Since they were bound by an irrevocable and eternal oath, they wanted to be absolutely certain that in taking this second oath they would remain faithful to the first.

General Chorié appeared to be persuaded. He suggested sending a memorandum to Berthier to obtain a postponement of the deadline. It would be necessary to write the pope and await the response. Since Chorié surely knew how things stood, this may have simply been an evasive stopgap measure.

On Easter Sunday, April 18, pressure from the local populace prompted the authorities to allow the people of Bastia to send the priests the gift of some traditional Easter foods, although they were not permitted to enter the prison.

Berthier's response arrived in Bastia on April 22 and was

read in public. It was severe and final. The gist of the message was that they had to take the oath because the Gospel, the pope, the emperor and conscience commanded it. Whoever would not swear the oath placed himself in opposition to the Gospel, the pope, the emperor and conscience, and would incur the penalties of the decree of May 4 of the previous year.

The letter and its tone were not convincing. In the afternoon a copy of the *Monitore*[2] was brought to the prisoners. It gave news of the concordat but did not note the retraction of Pius VII. The military, not accustomed to moral subtleties, suggested that the oath be taken conditionally. "Adopt this formula," they said:" If it is true what is said in the *Monitore*, I swear, etc...."

Naturally, this proposal was rejected. The destinations for the deportation of the priests in Bastia were to be Capraia, Calvi and Campoloro.[3] Deportation would serve both a logistical and punitive purpose. It was logistical, because space was needed for new arrivals; punitive, because they wanted to remove the priests from the affectionate embrace of the city. The bond between the inhabitants of Bastia and the deportees had grown to a worrisome degree. When General Berthier arrived in the city on May 9, the people greeted him with the chant: "Long live the priests!"

Berthier boasted that he would break the bond of solidarity between the deportees and the local populace, but even he was not so foolish as to believe it. He left a few days later without having settled anything. His words were like the blanks fired during the cannon salute he had received. They did have some effect, however, and made matters worse. *La Mosca* plied the sea incessantly to conduct the recusant priests to the place of

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[2] This is apparently a reference to a newspaper founded by a priest who supported an alliance with the French and many of the ideals of the French Revolution.

[3] Calvi and Campoloro are towns on the island of Corsica. Capraia is a nearby island.

punishment.

Suddenly the departures were suspended. For a few days there was no news. What had happened? There were no current storms that would justify interrupting service. Were the deportations suspended? Finally it was learned that the *La Mosca* had to take refuge in the intermediate port of Macinaggio to escape pirate ships. This slowed the evacuation from Bastia and prolonged the stay of Don Francesco in the Donjon.

On May 14, a rumor of a French victory was spreading. Was it true?

Leaving what remained of his grand army in Lithuania, Napoleon had retreated to Paris and had raised a new army of 400,000 men. With this new army, he went up against the Russians and defeated them at Lutzen and Bautzen. News of the victory was greeted by a twenty-five gun salute from the fortress.

Napoleon did not tolerate resistance from anyone. Even after the setback suffered during the Russian winter, he remained intransigent. He accepted the armistice of Pleswitz in June, following the proposal of Chancellor Metternich, but in subsequent negotiations he would not grant concessions and Austria felt forced to declare war.

Chapter 16
TO CALVI: A FINISHED MAN?

On May 28, 1813, the French command of Bastia, elated over Napoleon's victory, set up two *bureaux* or desks in front of the citadel. A court of inquiry intended to judge a hundred deportees in a single day. Proceedings got under way at 11. The soldiers led the detainees to the desks in groups of ten. The events that had lifted the spirits of the French created depression among the detainees, who nevertheless remained calm and determined.

Like the others, Don Francesco Albertini found himself being asked standard questions. His physical characteristics were recorded. Then he went with his group to the Donjon, escorted by an armed guard, who then brought out another ten prisoners. At four in the afternoon it was finished. No one had sworn the oath.

On the morning of May 31, the prisoners were told to be ready by 8:30. When all were in the courtyard, the sentences were pronounced, the same for each one: "Francesco Albertini, guilty of treason, that is, of rebellion against the sovereign, suffers the confiscation of his possessions, present and future, equivalent to civil death, and is no longer protected by the law. He is condemned to deportation."

For the French, this new condemnation to deportation was the equivalent to an admission of defeat. How can one deport a group of persons already deported unless one admits that these men in Bastia, so far from their homeland, were mysteriously now "at home?"

The accusation of treason sounded even more awkward. These men suffered all sorts of discomfort because they were faithful to a choice they had made. In public opinion from all

sides, including that of the French themselves, admiration for these persecuted priests mounted. Cesare Balbo, an Italian author and statesman, wrote: "I am ashamed at the spectacle of reprimanding these priests at the fortress. I began to suspect that these men, so abused, were actually the strongest and indeed the only strong men in Italy."

The transfer began at 2 p.m. on June 1. The caravan went as far as San Fiorenzo on 15 miles of bad road. It was a chaotic march, given the large number of deportees: 118 to be exact, along with their baggage. It was hot and sultry because of the dampness of the adjoining swamps. Albertini's single set of clothes, soaked with sweat and ripped in many places, made him suffer all the more.

San Fiorenzo was a beautiful port: spacious, deep and safe, it provided anchorage for many vessels. There were fewer than four hundred inhabitants. Malaria was a problem because of a nearby stagnant pond that hosted mosquitoes.

The deportees departed on the brig *Faure*, sixty feet long and twenty-five feet wide. It carried eight cannons as part of its armament and also was transporting boxes of rifles and munitions. Its destination: Calvi.

They set sail in late morning. They spent the night below deck, stretched out on the floor. Those who could, slept. The next day at 8 o'clock, they found themselves at Calvi. Shortly before landing, a boat that appeared to be a pirate ship created some apprehension among the crew, but it turned out to be a merchant vessel.

Calvi would have looked majestic and invincible had the English not destroyed it in 1796 when they seized the island after 51 days of shelling. The deportees now saw a pile of shattered walls that stretched to the sea. Among ruins that gave the town the appearance of a pile of rubble, the great mass of the Rocca or fortress stood out. It was the destination of the deportees.

The fortress was beautiful and on a magnificent site. It had one grave defect, however, from a military perspective. It was located below a hill from whose heights a potential enemy could easily bombard the stronghold. This disastrous weakness had been confirmed by the earlier English attack.

The deportees were ferried to land on a barge. Surrounded by soldiers, who marched to the beat of a drum, they entered the Rocca at 9 o'clock. About ten prisoners had arrived a few days before. It was an emotional encounter and the new arrivals were quickly informed of the living conditions, which were not good.

At 4 o'clock roll call, places in the large cells were assigned. At 6 o'clock there was another roll call for the distribution of straw mattresses. The last roll call was at 7:30 for the distribution of sheets and blankets, which stank of a greasy disinfectant. They had been used by people afflicted with scabies or similar skin conditions. Although all were tired, no one exactly yearned to sleep in those beds.

Of roughly a thousand inhabitants of the area, 700 were women. There were 200 old men and boys and only about a hundred young men, of whom forty were employed. The rest were off serving in Napoleon's army or were hiding out in the woods to escape military service.

The little emperor of the place was Saverio Giubbica, who had the office of sub-prefect. He engaged in a bit of illicit business. Not even a leaf moved without his earning at least a cent or two. It was not the first time that he had to manage such a number of guests. In receiving them he said: "Here either you take the oath or you die!"

His actions matched his words. He proclaimed a regimen of bread and water and ordered daily searches for food brought in secretly. Severe punishments would be meted out to the prisoners who violated orders. He certainly was following orders, because

it would have been in his interest if the prisoners had eaten their fill, since he would make a profit on their food. Evidently he was hoping for an abundant reward from a show of zeal.

Don Francesco's shabbiness had by now become quite dramatic. His spiritual prestige was so great that no one dared discuss the cause of his horrible appearance, but his spirituality was part of the problem. His undergarments were soft when he was sweating but now that they had dried they had become as stiff as leather armor. Lice scurried about on them. No one wanted to be around him.

Don Gabriele Gasparri wrote that Albertini found himself infested with the bugs just like another holy man, Saint Benedict Joseph Labre.[1] Almost everyone avoided him, but others who admired Albertini's virtue continued to speak with him.

When Don Anselmo Basilici returned to the group after one such conversation, the other prisoners asked him: "Did you catch anything?" and they examined him, searching for lice. Of course, they all had lice. Albertini could boast only of being the "primate" inasmuch as he was most hospitable to them because he was so dirty. He never plucked them from himself. He would say that he enjoyed their company and was raising them like honeybees.

Among the more quarrelsome of his friends was Don Francesco Pacini. One day, which was a little more than usually distressing, he accosted Albertini, also at the instigation of his companions, and said to him with a certain harshness: "See that you keep yourself a little cleaner and at least pluck those disgusting animals from yourself!"

Albertini, in good humor, replied, after his friend

[1] Saint Benedict Joseph Labre was a French Franciscan tertiary who lived his life as a pilgrim, often being derided as a homeless bum. He died of malnutrition in Rome in 1783.

had calmed down: "They are on me because I take good care of them."

Pacini did not enjoy the joke and got even angrier. Then Albertini stretched out a hand and removed something that was moving on the shoulder of his friend, saying: "Oh, look, here is a louse!" He put it on himself and continued: "They do not ever hide from me. I rather attract them, and so you have fewer."

Don Pacini turned on his heels. "Bravo, Canon Pig!" he said.

From then on, whenever he met him, he would say with irritation: "Good day, Canon Pig!"

"It's true," Albertini would respond jovially. "You said it well."

"Such responses," recounted Pacini, "made me realize the depth of his humility. Later on, convinced of the holiness of his life, I said nothing to him; on the contrary I was describing to my companions the kind of man he was." Nevertheless, after that encounter, he could not turn with confidence to his friend as he once had. He was scolded for this by Canon Basilici.

Pacini retorted: "I am his favored companion and hold him to be a great servant of God. I am not pleased to have shown such harsh behavior toward him, but I can't stand it. He disgusts me."

"But that is exactly what he wanted," Basilici confided.

"And he obtained it," Pacini concluded, annoyed but also penitent.

On June 6, cannon salutes were fired to mark an unspecified victory of the emperor. In church, a *Te Deum* was sung, after which the sub-prefect Giubbica, the commandant and the others responsible for the prison inspected the barracks. They gave orders to make the prisoners suffer hunger so that they would understand that this was serious business.

Some of the prisoners ended up near Albertini and he,

despite his filthy clothing, again resumed the role of animator that he had at Bastia. He proposed that they reflect on texts of Scripture, the Fathers of the Church, and of the saints.

His companions, ever more interested in his teaching, asked him to hold conferences. That sort of recognition and approval was enough to provoke inner conflict in Albertini to the point that he was tempted to back away. In the end, he had to give in so that he would not get in the way of doing good. Ah, if only he had del Bufalo beside him! He would willingly allow him to carry out such a task, since Gaspar had a calling for this. To deflect some of the merit from himself, he assigned the conferences on moral theology to Don Anselmo Basilici.

He was consistent in what he was doing. He recalled the words of John the Baptist: "*Illum oportet crescere, me autem minui*" "He must increase, I must decrease." The *illum* was his dear neighbor, who was Christ. The neighbor became the center of his attention and his first priority.

Don Francesco thought that it would be good for secular priests, once peace had returned to the Church, to get together for conferences on spiritual topics under a presiding priest rather than lounging around. And how worthwhile it would be were they to live together, rather than with their families. Here's the proof: while they were imprisoned, their spiritual life was wonderful and exciting. Persecution was transformed into grace.

His companions in exile had similar views. One of them wrote to him: "Such an advantageous academic exercise, maintained with zeal by the pious canon Albertini, besides offering wise instruction for the mind, drew them into holy conversation, and he made the boredom of prison and the days of confinement more pleasant."

Albertini had committed himself to strenuous discipline, which he understood to be the pearl of great price of the Gospel.

Whoever discovers a gem of immeasurable value and desires it must sell everything to acquire it. Not everyone is called to follow such a path, but there are some disciples who have been given the radical charism to sell all to acquire that pearl.

Albertini had based his life on the pursuit of humility. The triumphalist Church of Pius VI and of many past popes needed to recapture the characteristics of the men of Galilee. To a greater or lesser degree, all ecclesiastics were involved in this triumphalism, even those who offered the Church the testimony of their fidelity. They were attached to little comforts, complained about restrictions and dreamed of regaining their privileges. With a humble Church and with a humble pope, the rebellion of Martin Luther would not have taken place or at least it would not have had such wide-ranging consequences.

Albertini was convinced that in humility he had found the pearl of great price and his life was a witness to this. During the years of exile he wrote down some reflections. According to his custom, he expressed these in light verse, almost like nursery rhymes. It consisted of thirty-one "sentences" of two verses each. There was one sentence for each day of the month, to be repeated throughout the year, every year. *Gutta cavat lapidem!* 'The drop hollows the stone!'

Since human life is a journey toward a promised land that all dream about but which proves out of reach, Don Francesco wrote:

> Chi l'umiltà no siegue è affatto indegno
> mettere il piede nel beato Regno.
>
> The one who does not follow after humility is unworthy
> to put a foot into the blessed Kingdom.

On the contrary:

Chi di mente e di cuor sarà umiliato
in eterno verrà da Dio esaltato.

The one who is humbled in mind and heart
will be exalted by God in eternity.

Thus arrogance or simple presumption – as happened to the revolutionaries of France – leads to deluding oneself that a definitive kingdom can be constructed on earth. In such a kingdom, each person wants to be sovereign, which leads to conflict. There was only one remedy for this delusion, the truth:

Cenere io son e vermi e fango e fumo
eppur m'insuperbisco, eppur presumo?
Uom superbo e arrogante, ah! pensa spesso
quanto stolto e meschin sii da te stesso...
Ogni dono ch'è in te, qualunque bene,
dalla mano di Dio discende e viene.

Ashes am I, and worms and mud and smoke
even so I boast, even so I presume?
Proud and arrogant man, ah, think often
how foolish and miserable you are on your own...
Every gift that you have, every good thing
comes from the hand of God.

He viewed human history as a series of failures. The ruins of the grandeur of Rome proved this to him, as did the rivers of blood and the guillotine that had quenched the delirium of the Enlightenment. In those days the relentless crumbling of the Napoleonic Empire was also proving the truth of his view of history. He had never doubted it.

Oh! quanto è ver che senza l'umiltà
il tutto è un'illusione e vanità.

Oh! how true it is that without humility
everything is an illusion and vanity.

One needs to get back on the true path that leads to life. This was the path trodden by the Word who, "while being of nature divine, emptied himself, making himself like men." Not content with such humility, he accepted "even death, death on a cross." Humility was the way of Christ and humility; *la filotapinosi* or love of humble things had to be the way of Christians who were returning to God. The humble life was a choice of faith.

Se brami l'umiltà, pensa chi è Dio
e dì poscia a te stesso: E chi son io?
Se la vera umiltà tu aquisterai
con essa ogni virtù possederai.

If you desire humility, think who God is
and then say to yourself: And who am I?
If you would acquire true humility
with it you will possess every virtue.

Acquiring humility was thus a basic task to embark on a spiritual journey. God in fact resists the proud, while he grants grace to the humble.

Diffida di te stesso, e fida in Dio,
se d'umiltà nel cuor nutri il desio.
Quando un cuore è compunto ed umiliato
dalla bontà di Dio non è scacciato.
Non si può contrastar, che il ver abjetto
si la gioja di Dio e il suo diletto.
Che ti giova da tutti esser lodato,
quando poi dal Signor sei biasimato?

Trust not in yourself and trust in God
if you cherish the desire for humility in your heart.
When a heart is contrite and humbled
it is not shut out from God's goodness.
One cannot deny that the truly lowly person
is the joy of God and is his beloved.
Of what help is it to you to be praised by all,
when you are condemned by the Lord?

Acquiring humility requires ongoing study and exercise. One needs to seize every occasion, beginning with the Biblical adage, according to which reflecting on death is the foundation of wisdom. Everything must be carried out calmly, beginning with the acceptance of one's own limits, which implicitly contain the possibility of the fall.

Guarda con attenzion la sepoltura
e allor dell'umiltà prenderai cura.
Guarda la tua miseria ed il tuo niente
e nell'umiliazion sarai paziente.
Quando sarai dagli uomini ingiuriato,
pensa a quel fango di cui sei formato.
Se non sei pronto a perdonar le offese
che sei senza umiltà rendi palese.
Se operando tu cadi in qualche errore
non t'agitar, ma umiliati di cuore.
Che vive abjetto ed umile di cuore
tien le beffe e le offese in sommo onore.
Ti fai ricco tesoro e senza prezzo
se con pace ed umiltà prendi il disprezzo.

Look attentively at the tomb,

and then you will take care to be humble.
Look at your misery and your nothingness,
and you will be patient in your humiliation.
When you are injured by others,
think about the mud from which you are formed.
If you are not ready to pardon the offenses,
it is obvious that you lack humility.
If in acting you fall into some error,
do not become upset but be humble of heart.
You will make a rich and priceless treasure for yourself
if you accept contempt with peace and humility.

Humility was the foundation of a new sociology, based on tolerance and pardon.

Se il prossimo non stimi e lo deridi
segno è che di te stesso assai ti fidi.
Chi volge all'umiltà tutti is suoi affeti
soffre se stesso e ancor gli altrui difetti.
Se l'umiltà tu vuoi sinceramente
fa stima assai degli altri e di te niente.

If you do not esteem your neighbor and deride him,
it is a sign that you have too much faith in yourself.
The one who turns all affections to humility
endures one's defects and those of others.
If you sincerely desire humility
have a high opinion of others
and think of yourself as nothing.

The simple spirituality of Albertini was expressed in similar admonitions. One could also explain it thus: One who is nothing stands before God. If that person is aware of

being nothing, he or she is embraced by God and enjoy God's fatherly care.

Don Francesco sent the thirty-one sentences to the Countess Bentivoglio, who was rereading the *Introduction to the Devout Life* in Bologna. Albertini was intent on forming his beloved spiritual daughter to carry out the work of God who, in the words of the Madonna, "looked on the humility of his handmaid."

Meanwhile, the number of deportees in Calvi swelled to 229 with the arrival of more priests. The fortress was full. The season continued to be unseasonably cool. On June 20, when the feast of Corpus Christi was celebrated, snow covered the peaks surrounding Calvi.

The Corpus Christi procession began at 11. Young men in ordinary dress led the procession with the cross, followed by the young women with their cross, then the Company of Death[2], then a small group of the clergy. A small group of the authorities followed, headed by sub-prefect Giubbica. The people came at the end: about a hundred men and women. Small cannons were fired to add to the solemnity of the occasion.

At the conclusion of the octave the procession was repeated on a smaller scale. As a gesture of solidarity, the benediction was imparted in front of the fortress in such a way that the prisoners could participate from their windows. It was a moving moment. Inevitably what happened at Bastia was being repeated at Calvi: an emotional bond between the deportees and the populace was developing.

The people loved the incarcerated priests. They may not have expressed it in the same way as the people in Bastia, but this was due only to the smaller size of the populace. Protests over the

[2] Historically, the *Compagnia della Morte* refers to an elite cavalry corps that fought at the battle of Legnano in 1176. In this context, it seems to refer to an elite military unit.

severe regimen of those poor prisoners became more frequent. The absurdity of the situation was dramatic. How could one participate in a process in honor of Christ, and at the same time persecute persons who were enduring the harshest trials out of fidelity to Christ?

No feast and no rational consideration interrupted the regimen of bread and water. An exception was made on August 15: not because of the feast of the Assumption, but rather because it was the "feast" of Napoleon. The emperor had set that date for his own self-glorification. It seemed that the emperor had now entered soul and body into the divine heavens. The harsh food rationing was suspended for the day.

After the imperial celebration, a thorough search was carried out. The authorities needed to restore the rigorous regimen and wanted to be sure that the prisoners, taking advantage of the confusion and the temporary abundance, had not created secret reserves. Only some crumbs of leftover bread were found, and they were taken away.

Only on August 22, after eighty-two days of bread and water, were the prisoners permitted to order food from outside at their own expense. They had to use seven vendors approved by the government. No doubt Giubbica took some bribes from those who ended up on the list. Another "tax" was imposed on what was consumed. Every prisoner who ordered food had to pay a sort of duty when it arrived.

On October 16, 1813, Napoleon suffered defeat on the field of battle at Leipzig. Among all of the many urgent matters that pressed him now, he had to face the religious question. He continued to put pressure on the clergy and the pontiff so that he could tie them to his own destiny.

The situation was now desperate. If one had not jumped on the wagon of the winner, would one now jump on that of the

loser? Italy was in a state of agitation. The armies of Austria along with Britain, the Neapolitans of Murat and the French-Italians were engaged in a three-way match, contending with one another city by city. Even Napoleon's most faithful friends were keeping their distance. Gioacchino Murat, for example, was starting negotiations with Austria.

Having entered into a secret accord with Austria against his brother-in-law Napoleon, Murat invaded the Papal States. On January 19, 1814, General Lavauguyon, in Murat's service, took possession of Rome in the name of his king. General Miollis, who held the city for Napoleon, retreated with his troops into the Castel Sant'Angelo. On January 26 Murat published an edict that declared free all of the deported priests who were within his jurisdiction. Tuscany was included in that jurisdiction, and Don Gaspar could now go back to Rome. Albertini could not because the island remained in the hands of the French. The darkest period of his long exile was being prepared for him.

> He met his fate with his usual imperturbability. He was a finished man, in the old sense of the term: how a work of art is considered to be finished. In his own opinion he was not finished in that sense, as he thirsted for nothingness, but others would have said so. No one would have suspected that he could do otherwise. He was the incarnation of the verse of the psalm: "With the Lord on my side I do not fear. What can man do to me?" (Ps 118).

More than ever convinced that freedom was imminent, he understood that the time he had spent far from Rome was precious. During those apparently tedious years of exile, he had formed much clearer ideas about the Confraternity of the Most Precious Blood, so much at the center of his life.

The sodality of San Nicola in Carcere was originally

conceived as having three branches: the first was the institute of missionary priests, the second of nuns, the third of all the faithful who enrolled in the devotion. The first branch was in fact that of all the faithful, the Confraternity as it already existed. This formed the trunk, from which were to spring the other two branches. During the years of exile Don Francesco had given much thought to the details concerning the two branches. He was waiting calmly, and at the same time with strong desire, to see them sprout from the trunk.

He regarded as miraculous the spread of the devotion to the Blood of Christ. The Chaplet was now known throughout Europe. Don Francesco never ceased wondering at the power of God. A persecution could have uprooted the tender little plant, but instead it had spread it everywhere. It was the work of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 17
DEEP CALLS TO DEEP

Not far from Calvi there was a former convent dedicated to Saint Francis. After the friars were forced out, the state confiscated it. The enterprising Giubbica had acquired it, and, after making some adaptations to the structure, he rented it to the state to be used as a military hospital. The modifications were simply wooden partitions that created several aisles in the church.

His profits were streaming in until the authorities became aware that something was amiss. In a single year, some five hundred soldiers went on to a "better life." Was it a hospital or a slaughter house? It was all the same to Giubbica. What mattered to him was the rent. The authorities, however, declared the structure unfit to be a hospital.

The sub-prefect, with a big piece property vacant and unproductive on his hands, grew worried. He thought about transferring the deportees to the building. The site had been declared unsuitable for the sick but it could be suitable for the healthy. It was a logic appropriate to the intellectual and moral level of the bureaucrat. On February 18, 1814, the prisoners of the Rocca took their baggage and traveled to the former convent.

The otherwise excellent construction was well situated, as convents generally were, but it had deteriorated from neglect. During the years of abandonment, the structure had become soaked with the moisture that dripped from the ceilings, oozed through the walls and ran onto the floors. The straw mattresses were laid on the floor and were full of mold. The mattresses were smelly and damp. It was depressing to think about sleeping on them.

"Be happy, be happy," Don Francesco would go about

murmuring to his companions like a cheerleader. "One must suffer something for the Lord."

Most of the hundred and sixty "guests" were lodged in the former church. The rest were put into rooms on two floors and in the former dining room. Don Francesco was assigned a place in the church, in the transept, next to a pillar on the right of the triumphal arch. Even though it had been deconsecrated and broken up into partitions, the site still had some of the characteristics of a sacred place. For the prisoners of a deeper spirituality, like Albertini, this helped them to consecrate their suffering to God. The exiles could not celebrate Mass, but their whole lives could be seen as a Mass, as a truly holy sacrifice.

The poor food, together with the unhealthy air, made the days hellish. "The air of the locality was already unhealthy and became even more so for many of the deportees, who were living on top of one another." The latrine was located near the only window, which was always kept open so that they could breathe. The good air, before it could permeate the rest of the building, became nauseating and of little relief because of the stench of the toilet. Lack of water prevented flushing out the latrine and contributed to the stagnation.

The trip from the fortress to the convent, with all the degrading aspects that it involved, reduced Don Pacini to the darkest depression, and he remembered the plan he had made. "When I really hit bottom, I will go to Don Francesco," he had said. The moment had arrived. He believed he had hit bottom. Thus, after a hellish night, tormented by a swarm of bugs and lice that came out of the straw mattresses and blankets and assaulted his poor body, he went off, wandering among the beds like the prodigal son.

Albertini was on his feet. He ran toward his friend like the father in the parable. When he was a step away from his "dear son,"

however, he refrained from embracing him, for fear of disgusting him. "You aren't able to sleep, eh?" he said.

"Yes, exactly," replied Don Pacini.

"Our straw beds and the bugs are so much better than the cross of Jesus Christ," he said. "We are still alive, but our divine Redeemer died in the midst of sorrows and scorn, pouring out all of his Blood."

He then began to give an ascetical discourse, without mincing words. "If you suffer some pain, you deserve it," he said quite frankly.

Don Pacini believed that this comment meant that he deserved to suffer because he had refused to speak to a holy man dressed in filthy clothes.

Don Pacini returned to his bed only partially comforted. He had not completed all that he had intended to carry out. He had not sought forgiveness, but he promised himself to seek Albertini's pardon at the first opportunity.

One day Don Pacini was moved to let Albertini know he regretted that he had failed to offer him respect.

"When?" asked Don Francesco.

"Every time that I called you Canon Pig."

Don Francesco fell to his knees before his friend and kissed his feet. Pacini, with tears in his eyes, tried to lift Albertini to his feet. Meanwhile, other deportees had gathered, and when they saw what was happening, they also began to cry since they knew of the preceding events.

Every day the news arriving from the continent became more promising for the exiles. On February 20, 1814, the sub-prefect Giubbica told them that the pope was free and on his way to Rome; at that moment he was in Nice. The boss of Calvi was beginning to be seriously concerned about his own future. Would he have to surrender to his victims? Better to take a

more conciliatory course. He did not dismiss the possibility of portraying himself as a victim of the Napoleonic regime. France had been invaded by allied troops.

Four days later the prisoners, who had not celebrated Mass for nine months, were given permission to do so. It was an immense joy for all. In every corner of the dormitories, little altars were set up. From five in the morning until noon they did nothing but celebrate Mass and serve at the Masses of the others. From that day forward, the treatment was more humane, but they continued to remain in the prison. Giubbica was not capable of taking initiatives that were too courageous, at least when courage involved some risk.

At Bastia, meanwhile, things were much the same. The news that reached them from the continent, especially from France, made conditions explosive and the soldiers who were charged with keeping order were becoming less and less reliable and were inclined to fraternize with the very factions they were supposed to repress.

The Croatian garrison of Bastia was made up of eight hundred men. Even if they did so unwillingly, they served Napoleon because, after becoming enemy prisoners, they shared the fortunes of their sovereign, the emperor of Austria. He was forced to ally himself with the French autocrat and even become a member of his family by marriage. After the Russian disaster, however, Austria had kept its distance, until finally going over to the now victorious opposing camp. The Croatians, therefore, considered themselves to be in an awkward situation since they were linked to a man whose fortunes were in decline.

The commanding officer was not concerned. One day when the Croatians were parading, he had them surrounded and disarmed, after which he shut them up in the convent of the Blue Nuns. They were given rations of bread and water, and cannons

were pointed at the gates in order to stifle any rash actions. The rigid French control of the island became more precarious day by day. Now there was another bunch of men to keep under guard. When would the chaos begin?

The task of keeping an eye on the population and the soldiers was entrusted to colonial troops. These were unpopular with the local people. Formed from the dregs of all the soldiers of Europe who were sent to the islands for punishment, the colonial corps flaunted its fierceness. They were men inured to every crime and, in addition, they were not receiving their pay. They considered themselves authorized to be compensated indirectly. The local people, already hard pressed by taxes, were now at the mercy of those thugs. They began to imagine the violent treatment in store for them. The Corsicans sent a deputation to General Launèt to request that their security be entrusted to the national guard.

The proposal, since it reflected negatively on France, was a provocation. The deputation was brusquely shown the door. The Corsicans sent a second deputation, which obtained an even more definite refusal accompanied by threats. The threats were followed by action, as the cannons of the Citadella, previously aimed at the port to repel invaders, were now aimed at the town.

At that point, the Corsicans remembered how to be Corsicans. They armed themselves, but without the appropriate secrecy. On April 11, General Launèt attempted to forestall trouble. At the head of his soldiers and to the beat of drums, he went to take up positions in strategic places of the city.

The inhabitants of Bastia, even if they were poorly prepared, considered the drumbeat to be the signal for an attack. Some ran to liberate the Croatians and others got ahead of the colonial troops, occupying the parade ground of the Citadella and surrounding it. The general and his men found themselves in front

of eight hundred Croatians, skeletal from meager rations, and therefore furious. Next to them was a no less determined mass of citizens in arms. They were on the brink of being massacred. Given the situation of France, was it worth it to make demands?

After vain attempts at talking things over, the general's head was surrounded by guns. It was a kind of crown of thorns. He was told: "Either surrender or have your brains blown out!"

The general surrendered. He handed over the Citadella. Everything was resolved within a half hour.

The entire French garrison had surrendered: three thousand infantry and two hundred policemen. They were divided into groups and were held under surveillance by the Croatians until it was possible to send them to Livorno or Toulouse, depending on their nationality.

The subsequent days were characterized by frenzied waiting. A provisional government for the island was formed, and the national flag was raised. There was an alert that a French army of five thousand men was in the heights around Bastia. In fact, that "army" consisted of small bands of bandits who were looking for loot. It was an old and common phenomenon. The people of the outlying districts, upon learning of some social disorder, would descend on the coastal cities in order to profit from the situation.

The priests thought that it would be better to leave the island as soon as possible. They had survived persecution, and they did not want to stay and become victims of the liberation. They wished to express their gratitude to the citizenry. The canon of the cathedral of Terni, Don Luigi Garavita, was charged with the task. He gave a noble discourse which received an equally noble response from the head of the committee of liberation, Frediano Vidau.

The former prisoners of Bastia departed on the morning of April 16, 1814, in the direction of Livorno. On the same day,

detachments of Croatian and Corsican troops headed to Calvi to liberate the priests who were in the convent. On April 19, shortly before the arrival of the men from Bastia, the sub-prefect sent word to the prisoners that they were free. They had won!

The prisoners swarmed into the town, hailed by the populace, and headed toward the port to weigh their chances of getting to Bastia. The first departures would be the following day. The falling rain seemed to be a kind of baptism inaugurating a new life for them.

Albertini and his 230 companions streamed into Bastia and were received by the people with a feast. The exiles also wanted to pay homage to the citizenry and its leaders. Monsignor Domenico Testa gave the public address. It was a sincere and mutual tribute.

Don Francesco's health had deteriorated greatly. In addition to the harsh rations inflicted by Napoleon, he had added his own voluntary mortification and had renounced all care of his person. The thought of quickly returning to his ministry, to take care of the loose ends of many projects left in suspense, gave him a burst of energy that made him appear to be in perfect health.

This is how his companions on the boat saw him, and this is how he himself felt on those first days of May, as he gave thanks to God for a life so rich and full of joy. The turbulent sea seemed to place a final obstacle in the way of that return they so longed for, but then suddenly the port of Livorno opened its arms to them as if it were God himself.

Chapter 18
EVERYONE IS IN ROME

Meanwhile, the Catholic world of Rome had not been idle. Some of the activities initiated by the exiles prior to their leaving the city had continued. Among these were the evening oratory of Santa Maria in Vincis, the service to the poor at Santa Galla and the Confraternity of the Most Precious Blood. These institutions had continued to function, and despite the distance and some limitations, the priests in exile were still involved in their growth. We have seen this in the case of the letter Albertini sent from Bastia to members of the Confraternity. Gaspar del Bufalo had acted in a similar fashion with his friends at the evening oratory and at Santa Galla.

Don Gaetano Bonanni had committed himself to follow the example of Saint John Francis Regis. In his venture he had received the encouragement of Albertini and even the moral support of a prophecy by Sister Maria Agnese.

On June 17, 1813, the Feast of Corpus Christi, Don Gaetano, following in the footsteps of Regis, was inspired to transform the Holy League into the *Opera degli Operai Evangelici*, customarily referred to in English as the "Gospel Workers." This new step offered a stronger institutional identity for the group, whose members were committed not only to meet together from time to time as in the past, but who now accepted some rules of life and considered the possibility of living in community.

That same day, the members celebrated their first meeting, and all who were members of the Holy League were in attendance: Domenico La Monaca, Antonio Santelli, Luigi Gonnelli, Giuseppe Marconi, Gaetano Palma, Luigi Salvatori, Adriano Giampedi, Pietro Sinceri, Vincenzo Tani and Nicola Roggi. Only Gaspar

del Bufalo, still in exile, was missing. The meeting took place in a room attached to the church of Santa Maria in Vincis, where the evening oratory was held.

From the outset, Don Gaetano had proposed to those who had come to the meeting "the system of missions, doing everything to proclaim the following text: 'You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide. You are to go out for the glory of God to bear fruit for the salvation of souls, that your fruit may remain in your own sanctification'."[2] This quote describes the nature of the work: the call to go into the field of the Lord to bear fruit and to ensure that the results obtained were solid and enduring.

During one of the first meetings, Bonanni had surprised everyone in asserting, perhaps in response to the difficulties that his companions were bringing up, "Next year the institute will be an accomplished fact."

A declaration like this seemed incredible to those at the meeting, in particular to Don Adriano Giampedi, since the French had suppressed the old and powerful religious orders. Could one really think that a new congregation could be established now? In truth, this would not have been totally impossible, given the spontaneous nature of the organization Bonanni was contemplating. One could even speculate that the idea of this Roman priest would be a clever way of reviving a form of religious life, fooling the French.

Bonnani then astonished his companions even more by saying: "A holy nun has said this!"

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[2] The first sentence (taken from the Vulgate or Latin translation of the Bible) is a quote from John 15:16. The second sentence might be considered a reflection on or expansion of the Gospel verse.

A holy nun had said that a new institute would arise. Here is the prophecy of Sister Maria Agnese del Verbo Incarnato viewed from a different angle, since Bonanni was certainly not thinking that the emerging work would need to be under the title of the Most Precious Blood, and even less that the founder would have to be Don Gaspar del Bufalo. He was referring back to part of a conversation with Albertini that remained in his mind.

Everyone knew of Bonanni's aversion to the widespread interest in miracles (*il miracolismo*) among laity and clergy alike. How could he allow himself to believe in *this* miracle? Those present refrained from seeking more light on the subject because they respected him and did not want to cause him any discomfort.

Bonanni's initiative did involve some problems. The French were becoming increasingly oppressive. Don Gaetano was supported by Monsignor Belisario Cristaldi, a very enterprising lawyer of the curia, a defender of the poor, and an expert in economic matters. He was zealous but also ambitious. In the beginning of the occupation, he had collaborated with the invaders, little by little detaching himself from them as the services they requested of him began to prick his conscience. Now he was living clandestinely. He thought that living a common life (*la convivenza*) could be mistaken for a seditious gathering.

In his memoirs, Bonanni says that he founded the Gospel Workers "so that the members would attend to their own sanctification and that of others and would imitate Jesus Christ in his active and contemplative life, with a zeal for the salvation of souls." He wanted to create a new model of the secular priest, living in community, dedicated to the apostolate and committed full time to his vocation.

His intention to deal with the challenge of the life of the clergy can be deduced from his choice of Thursday both for the foundation and for the periodic meetings. It was a way

of expanding the meaning of the first Holy Thursday. On that day the Eucharist and the priesthood were established. In the context of the institution of the Eucharist, the priesthood was established not only a personal gift but as a priestly community. The priesthood was meant to be refounded around the Eucharist, a refounding of the Cenacle of the apostles.

The name of the new institute was clearly linked to the parable of the workers in the vineyard (cf. Mt 20:1-16). It was born of an apostolic necessity. This was amply confirmed by the fact that, in the course of 1813, the Workers conducted a considerable number of missions in many communities. In addition, there were many spiritual exercises, visits to prisons and evening oratories.

Don Gaspar del Bufalo was invited to join the Workers on December 29, 1813. He was then in Florence, waiting to depart for Corsica. In Florence he was a guest of the Strozzi family. His stay was extended because the French ships could not leave port because of the presence of English ships. Gaspar responded to the invitation on January 14, 1814 with an enthusiastic letter and suggested that Saint Francis Xavier, model of apostolic activity, be named as protector of the sodality.

Little more than a month later, Napoleon freed the pope and the priests who were still under his authority. He also restored two departments of the Roman State. Now everyone could set off for Rome to pursue their interrupted projects again.

In Rome Gaspar took part in the meetings and activities of the Gospel Workers. The first meeting in which he participated was on February 14,1814. He took the minutes in his role as secretary. Bonanni was absent, occupied with Lenten preaching. The pious works of Santa Galla, the Hospital of San Gallicano, and the Prison and Hospital of Sant'Onofrio were recommended to the members. Those at the meeting were not thinking of the Confraternity of the Most Precious Blood.

On April 2, 1814, Don Gaspar gave a series of spiritual exercises to the employees of the Roman Curia on behalf of the Gospel Workers. Monsignor Cristaldi knew how to size people up. Cristaldi had an immediate admiration for the young priest, whom he had known for many years and whom he had followed during the course of his imprisonment. From this was born a friendship that came from a profound esteem. He understood that this priest, just returned from exile, was the man who would give the Gospel Workers the cohesive strength that Don Gaetano could not.

Albertini, meanwhile, had finally disembarked in Livorno and went to Bologna by way of Florence to organize his projects and order new editions of the Chaplet. Now it was time to pick up the pace to support the moral recovery of the people in the name of the Blood of Christ. For such a project, he needed both men and women to be missionaries of the devotion that would change the world. Only devotion to the price of redemption would serve to recall people to an awareness of the value of salvation, and that salvation had to be accepted and lived.

The Countess Caterina Bentivoglio Orsi also intended to put her hand to the plow, but the enterprise seemed complex. The lingering illness of the noble lady's husband was a problem. When she indicated that she would be available to head the feminine institute, the man's death seemed imminent. Instead, years passed, and he lived on. Being a widow was indispensable for a full-time responsibility, and she could certainly not pray that God hasten to take her sick husband. Albertini, in the course of his meditations, seems to have come up with another plan. He was now rather inclined to found a feminine institute of a contemplative nature, of *adorers* of the Blood of Jesus. Perhaps he found this more suited to the personality of his "firstborn daughter," or perhaps he believed that the great work would require the support of prayer.

He remained in Bologna for about a month, hailed and

treated as a hero. He guided his disciple Bentivoglio in the final draft of the *Introduction to the Humble Life* and of the rules of the institute. With these two manuscripts in hand he returned to Rome by way of the shrine of Loreto. We learn this in a letter of Gaspar del Bufalo, who wrote to the Countess Virginia Malaspina Caracciolo: "Albertini is presently in Bologna and I imagine that he went there so that he could make a trip to the holy House in Loreto. Right here, we are in the process of enjoying the fulfillment of divine goodness! The Holy Father's return is expected within days, and in the meantime, great celebrations are being prepared. Some prelates have already set up a provisional government in the Pope's name, and Rome is truly rejoicing" (Letter 96).

Once he was back in Rome, Albertini threw himself headlong into parish work and the further development of his ideas for the Confraternity. He immediately sought out his dear son Gaspar, with whom he meant to "develop the divine grandeur." The latter, even if a little confused, was already quite involved in Albertini's plans, to the point of making a note of it to Malaspina.

The friendship between Gaspar and Cristaldi would lead to a meeting between Cristaldi and Albertini, who was already acquainted with him. A steadfast triumvirate had been born. None of the three saw any difficulty in joining the institute started by Bonanni to the Confraternity of San Nicola in Carcere: Albertini, because of his humility, Cristaldi, because of his power and Gaspar, because of his dynamism. Was Bonanni of the same opinion?

Don Francesco was in agreement with Cristaldi on two fundamental points: organizing a corps of missionary priests and entrusting the enterprise to Don Gaspar del Bufalo. He would entrust the responsibility of spreading the devotion to the Most Precious Blood to Don Gaspar. The matter did not conflict with Cristaldi's plans; rather it would give more cohesion to the group

and more fruitful results to the preaching. There remained, however, the stumbling block of administration.

Albertini now saw his plans moving decisively to completion, fulfilling his own prophecy and that of Sister Maria Agnese. Providence was moving the story along.

Chapter 19
REWARD AND PUNISHMENT

When Pius VII declared that everyone had something for which he or she needed pardon, beginning with himself, he could not have been thinking of a pure and simple cancelling of the past. Justice had to be consistent. Those who had paid the price of years in exile and the harshest trials could not be treated equally with those who had bowed to the usurper and had thus led an easy life.

On April 10, 1814, Gioacchino Murat, not wishing to lose an opportunity to show his devotion to the pope, had a manifesto posted in the streets of Rome presenting the imminent return of the Vicar of Christ to his see as though it were a gift from Murat himself. On April 11, the apostolic delegate Agostino Rivarola arrived in Rome. The pope had given him the task of taking care of the transfer of powers. A Te Deum was sung in all the churches.

Rivarola was believed to be a harsh man, and his first decisions revealed his intention to seek a rigorous justice, instilling either fear or hope as the case might be. It was the widespread opinion that for those who had been unfaithful, hard times were in store, times of purification.

Many members of the clergy had sworn the oath. Not all were equally guilty. Those who had taken the oath with clenched teeth and then were ashamed of what they had done could not be considered as guilty as those who had flaunted their actions and had urged others to follow their example. Those who had sworn early on were guiltier than those who had given in after months or years of suffering. A married cleric[1] was less responsible than a priest, and a simple priest was less responsible than a bishop.

[1] According to canon law of the time, clerics (those who had been tonsured) could be married. Becoming a cleric was not necessarily a step toward major orders as would be the case later.

A graduated scale of censures was proposed, which would inevitably correspond to a graduated scale of reward for those who had been imprisoned. Some who took the oath dragged others along with them, while others had been mentors who encouraged those who refused. The latter suffered more severe treatment and would receive appropriate compensation for their suffering.

Despite his declaration of benevolence, the pope showed severity as he made his way to Rome, not accepting the homage of those who had taken the oath, especially if they were bishops. He let them know they would soon learn of the decisions made regarding their conduct. He had a rather spiritualistic interpretation of events. If, as many holy people maintained, God wanted to purify his Church with suffering, Pius VII welcomed this occasion to be an instrument of that purification.

The decisions were roughly the following. Those who had sworn the oath had to retract it. Their penance was to be proportional to the offence and was to be determined by a diocesan commission. The episcopal curias were to establish juries. The formula prescribed by the Holy See for retracting the oath was this: "I the undersigned revoke and retract, absolutely and simply, the oath that I took to the recently defunct French Government, submitting myself wholeheartedly to whatever has been declared by His Holiness Our Pope Pius VII in his various instructions."

Some priests wanted to broaden the text, some to reduce their responsibility, and others, in a fit of humiliation (sincere or feigned) to exaggerate their repentance. Most frequently the requests were to introduce the formula of retraction with generic excuses. For example: "Although in swearing the oath that was extorted from me by force I did not intend to sacrifice anything that had been required by Religion and by the Laws of the Church, even after having some notice that His Holiness Our Lord Pope Pius VII disapproved of the oath thus sworn, I the undersigned, etc."

The sanctions imposed for priests and laity were some days or months of spiritual exercises. When repentance was not certain, priests had to be removed from those duties that involved public ministry or were even to be suspended from exercising the power of orders (suspension *a divinis*). Bishops were treated with greater severity and were removed from their respective sees and placed in isolation until further arrangements could be made.

With regard to the rewards to be conferred upon those who had not taken the oath and had undergone exile and confiscation of property, the directives were as follows: "In the provision of parishes and other ecclesiastical benefices, in the appointment to Offices, honors (*preminenze*) and positions" they were to have precedence according to the following formula: first, the deportees, then those who had not sworn, and finally, those who had retracted their oath before the fall of Napoleon.

At that point, those who were seeking to further their career had only to play their cards well. It was necessary to extol in various ways the misfortunes they had faced, the dangers to their lives and the ill treatment they had suffered. In this context, some of those who had not been sent into exile appeared to be displeased, as if they had been cheated!

Take the case of Don Adriano Giampedi. He observed: "Although by decree the persecution did not extend to simple priests, the police authorities broadened it to include all and I was called before the commissioner of Milan who recorded my refusal in his register." What he was saying was, more or less, that it was not his fault that he was not sent into exile.

Once again, Albertini went against the tide. He kept silent. When he spoke about his exile, it appeared that he was describing a pleasure trip. Everything was marvelous. Everywhere he had experienced the joys of paradise. He said, "I have already been rewarded enough. Give the reward to others."

Francesco Azzurri, director of the Monte di Pietà,[2] was among those deported to Corsica. His son Giovanni, an architect, constructed an accurate model of the notorious convent of San Francesco in Calvi in order to pay homage to his father and praise the witness that he gave. The model indicated with painstaking precision the location of the beds of the prisoners along with their names. Many copies were printed and distributed in Rome and in Corsica. Canon Felici di Frascati composed a two-line Latin poem mocking the sub-prefect Giubbica: "Because he wanted the whole world to sing his praises, he locked up the flock of Christ on this straw."

In some cases, everything was resolved with a friendly glass of wine or two. There were those who had sworn the oath who returned, pompously, to the ecclesiastical scene and those who had been persecuted and were overlooked. There were exiles who knew how to derive the maximum benefit from the choice they had made, which they came to see as a useful "investment." Others who had not reaped any advantage were proud of the choice they had made.

An ecclesiastical maxim asserts that since the episcopate is a good thing, it is not unseemly to desire it. One needs to look at *why* it is desired: to be of service or to dominate. Christ said: "Whoever wishes to be the first should be the servant of all." A Christian does not become a servant so that eventually one might "become the first." The Christian knows that to be the first means to become a servant and to remain a servant. The Christian expects nothing and does not compete with others, since a disciple does not have competitors. Who could aspire to oust someone from last

[2] Literally the "mountain of piety or of mercy," a generic term that in modern Italian means "pawnbroker." Here it refers to a lending institution run for charitable purposes. The reference to *the* Monte di Pietà is not clear. The phrase is still part of the title of the world's oldest bank, the Monte dei Paschi di Siena.

place? The Christian welcomes being in last place. In the course of loving service, one does not compete but rather collaborates.

This was the society that the simple man Albertini dreamed of: a society of relatives, a family, just like his family in their home on the Piazza Montanara. How could he be concerned to derive any benefit from the gift of the sufferings he had undergone? Can one have a reward for a reward? Can one expect something for a privilege one enjoyed? During the exile he had experienced so much love, and he had sown love abundantly. To him there seemed to be so many miracles of the Most Precious Blood. Now he felt like a child who wanted to plant a tree. It was a tree destined to become much bigger than the child, a child whom no one would need to remember, because the tree would grow on its own and through the work of others.

Meanwhile he continued in his roles as animator, as director of monasteries, and as a guide for priests and the faithful.

Wherever he looked, anxious as he was to have the Blood of redemption valued, he saw spiritual disaster and a society in a terrible state. The vastness of the problem made it urgent to establish the branches of the Confraternity that were lacking, the Missionaries and the Adorers, as well as to advance the spread of the Confraternity among the laity, because the Blood of Jesus had not been shed in vain. It was a fixed idea for him, the seed of the tree that he intended to see planted at the center of the Church.

The seeds of the great trees are generally small. Little children grasp many in their hands. In Don Francesco's heart there was only a single seed. He had planted it and now he waited for that tree to grow.

Chapter 20
THE GREAT MANEUVERS

Don Gaetano Bonanni was born in Rome on June 16, 1766. He was four years older than Albertini and twenty years older than Gaspar. His family was poor and was in service to Bishop (later Cardinal) Giovanni Archinto.

At his birth, there was a sudden movement in the clouds in the sky and a ray of light came through the window and shone on the very spot where the baby was coming into the world. His mother exclaimed: "May heaven look after my child!"

When he was fourteen, his studies ended, and he was placed in a grocer's shop as an errand boy because the family needed his income to help support his four sisters.

The grocer, whose name is lost to history, was a very good man. He was struck by the goodness and intelligence of the boy and wanted him to continue his studies. He intended to make Gaetano a partner and heir of his property. Gaetano was a quiet and sensible boy. He did not wear fancy clothes. Before leaving the house to go to school, he would shake off the face powder which was much in use at the time. His patron, whom he loved much, was liberal in its use in order to get rid of the smells of the shop. Gaetano would ruffle his hair; he would hide the fancy cuffs and the jumper. He knew he was poor and did not want to pass for a rich boy.

Little by little, he had progressed in his studies and felt a vocation to the priesthood. He was ordained on December 18, 1790, when Gaspar was four years old, Albertini twenty, and Cristaldi twenty-six.

An aura of saintliness had surrounded him from his early days, and many remembered that ray of light and the prayer of his mother. It was probably that sort of attention surrounding him and

the rumor of miracles attributed to him that made him somewhat intolerant of supposed manifestations of the supernatural. He was a down-to-earth priest, tenacious, stubborn, reflective to the point of being a bit of a slowpoke, and sometimes brusque and unapproachable. If Don Gaspar was a horse, Don Gaetano was a mule. He had the gait of the *montanari*.[1] He continued to have an aversion to elegance and refinement, a legacy of his humble origins.

He dressed in garments of rough cloth and always wore the *cilice*[2] next to his skin. Convinced that the most serious problem facing the Church was the clergy, he proposed some initiatives for their ongoing formation. Albertini shared his views.

Would a man like Bonanni readily join the Confraternity of San Nicola in Carcere? He thought it wise to proceed with caution. His love for consistency led him to reject further modifications of his projects. Gaspar also needed to proceed with caution if he was to associate himself with Bonanni; Gaspar's fiery, and even in some ways egocentric, temperament might not fit well with Bonnani's more stolid approach to life.

Prudence also dictated that Gaspar, who wanted to become a Jesuit, make a definite decision about his vocation. His aspiration to join the Jesuits became a real possibility as soon as he knew that the pope would restore the Society of Jesus. Albertini prayed for guidance, asking Sister Maria Agnese to send an answer from heaven about which path he should follow.

The institute founded by Bonanni was an association of secular priests who remained secular priests even if they lived a common life. The houses in which they lived were called houses

[1] The word literally means "mountain folk" or perhaps even "hillbillies." As noted before, the Piazza Montanara was probably so named because so many people from the hills surrounding Rome came there on business.

[2] *Cilice* can refer either to a hair shirt, a rough, irritating cloth worn next to the body as a penance, or, more recently, to a spiked metal belt or chain worn for the same purpose.

of the clergy or mission houses. It was not a new idea, but support for such an arrangement was widespread, particularly after the confusion produced by the various laws of the past fifteen years. With the suppression of the religious orders, many clergy lived in a kind of diaspora.

In Bologna, Bartolomeo dal Monte[3] had gathered together missionary priests without the bond of vows, but solely with the promise to live a common life. An association of missionary priests had arisen in Malta. Many bishops wanted such institutes.-

For a society so structured, there was no need for it to be named for or dedicated to a single devotion. This would give it the characteristics of a true and proper religious institute. Was Albertini thinking of such an institute? Almost certainly not, since he was most interested in the devotion to the Blood of Christ. He wanted a group of missionaries for the express purpose of spreading the devotion of the Confraternity to the whole world. He thought it would be good if they were to live together, but he did not see this as indispensable, at least at that time.

In sum, if the Gospel Workers did not wish to be a true and proper religious institute, this was not a problem for the missionary priests envisioned by Albertini. It would be sufficient for them to be committed to the devotion and to spreading it. Furthermore, Gaspar wanted to become a Jesuit. In theory, Don Gaspar could be a Jesuit and still promote the devotion to the Most Precious Blood as a missionary of the Confraternity. It would have been impossible for him to be a Jesuit and a Gospel Worker because of the obligation to community life that would entail.

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[3] Bartolomeo dal Monte (1726-1778) was a priest of the diocese of Bologna who was dedicated to the preaching of missions and who had founded an institute of diocesan priests to engage in this apostolate. His ministry was known to Gaspar, and in a letter to Cardinal Cristaldi on July 5, 1815, he writes that he had written to Bologna to obtain a copy of the rule for the missionary priests he had established.

When Don Francesco returned to Rome, he had good reasons for not hindering Gaspar from pursuing a religious vocation with the Jesuits. But his thoughts on the matter, in the light of the enterprise started by Bonanni and the proposals being advanced by Monsignor Cristaldi, were evolving. Now he was in favor of a common life for the Missionaries of the Confraternity, in mission houses with a defined structure.

On August 7, 1814, Pius VII took the momentous step of restoring the Jesuits. He went in person to the Church of the Gesù to read the bull. Some weeks later, Gaspar, with a group of friends, presented a request for admission to the Society of Jesus. There were many young priests who felt attracted by the prospect of refounding the glorious congregation. Among those zealous young priests were Don Luigi Locatelli, Don Adriano Giampedi and Don Biagio Valentini. Don Gaspar presented himself to the superior general of the Society, Luigi Panizzoni, together with his friend Don Carlo Odescalchi. They were accepted and told to await a written communication.

Don Francesco, confronted with what amounted to a *fait accompli*, was convinced that it was now time to act. Don Gaspar would have to join the Gospel Workers and these would become the Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood. At stake was a project that Albertini had long had in mind and which he had identified with the prophecy of Sister Maria Agnese. The project would fail if Don Gaspar were to enter the Jesuits.

Cristaldi, eager to resolve the problems, freed Albertini from his worries. He got the pope interested by explaining to him the project that was in progress. A few days later Don Gaspar and Don Carlo Odescalchi, who were waiting instructions from Father Panizzoni, were, to their great amazement, summoned to an audience with Pius VII.

"We have heard," he said to them, "that you wish to be Jesuits. It is our will that you remain among the secular clergy. You, Don Carlo, will be a diplomat and you, Don Gaspar, will be an apostolic missionary, but of the secular clergy."[4]

When he returned to his director, Don Gaspar related what had happened. Even Don Francesco did not think that this was due to supernatural intervention. He knew that this was Cristaldi's doing, and in a certain sense, his own. He repeated to his disciple what he had been telling him for many years.

"It is beyond doubt that God is calling you to the ministry of the missions for the glory of the Most Precious Blood. You must concern yourself with the institute meant to promote such a good work!"

Don Gaspar replied: "And my inclination to become a Jesuit? I see myself as a follower of Saint Ignatius, the confrere of my Xavier."

"That is not your vocation," Don Francesco replied curtly.

Don Gaspar gave in to his director and made himself available to Albertini and Cristaldi with all the force of his personality. Perhaps he was all the more energetic since those who embark on a new direction in life often pursue it with greater energy.

In October of 1814, he went to preach in Giano dell'Umbria on the orders of Cristaldi and to evaluate the suitability and availability of an ancient abbey dedicated to the martyr Saint Felix. On November 30, the pope gave the abbey to the Gospel Workers. Many details remained to be worked out, but a decisive step had been taken.

Albertini's projects were not identical with those of Cristaldi. Don Francesco set his sights on the devotion, and

[4] Odescalchi eventually became a cardinal but later resigned and joined the Society of Jesus.

Cristaldi on the political and social consequences of popular missions. Albertini wanted Gaspar to remain in Rome, whereas Cristaldi wanted him travel throughout the Papal States. The bond between del Bufalo and Cristaldi was well known to the Gospel Workers. Less obvious was his connection with Albertini since it was of a more spiritual nature. Even so, it was this connection that would be significant and decisive. Had this connection come to light it would have meant more than a few problems. The Gospel Workers and Bonanni himself would not have welcomed it.

Del Bufalo was a member of the Gospel Workers and had a right to become involved in its affairs, but the others might not be happy with his meddling. Cristaldi's contribution was of an economic and organizational nature. He took his time. This high-ranking prelate could use his power, but in return for certain advantages he could permit some things to occur as long as they did not seriously affect the project. The same thing could not be said of the interference of Albertini, who supported a specific devotion and who had instituted an association that had already been approved and was flourishing, which the Gospel Workers would be joining. There was already talk of elevating the Confraternity to the status of an archconfraternity. In sum, Cristaldi was thinking more of an alliance, whereas Albertini was thinking of a merger.

Such reflections were beyond the simple heart of Don Francesco. He could hardly wait to hand on his creations: to Gaspar, the missionaries; to Monsignor Falzacappa, the feminine branch; and to Canon Muccioli, the Confraternity.

In view of the prospective merger, Don Francesco decided to give a mission in the parish of San Nicola in December 1814 to mark the sixth anniversary of the founding of the Confraternity. He wanted his spiritual son to direct the mission and Gaspar obeyed. He had companions: Domenico La Monaca, Antonio

Santelli and Luigi Locatelli, all Gospel Workers and candidates to be missionaries of the Confraternity. Albertini wanted to associate those missionaries with devotion to the Precious Blood, and he wanted to demonstrate the value of the new devotion that was now being preached.

The commitment to San Nicola did not stop Don Gaspar from attending to the details of the transfer of the house of San Felice. Gonelli went to Giano with him. Gaspar had told Albertini that he was in a difficult situation. It was true, but Don Francesco was actively working to realize his project. He probably hoped to form the nucleus of the Priests of the Most Precious Blood prior to opening the house of San Felice so that they would be ready for the venture. How could he get the whole group to adopt the devotion to the Most Precious Blood?

He spoke about this with Cristaldi and argued his case. On February 28, 1815, Cristaldi wrote to Don Gaspar in support of Albertini's idea. Don Gaspar, on his part, wrote to Bonanni explaining the reasons given Cristaldi by Albertini and by Cristaldi to himself, without mentioning Albertini by name. Finding the motives "very compelling," del Bufalo let Bonanni know that the priests would certainly be adopting the devotion to the Most Precious Blood. The project should be considered an accomplished fact.

In this new context there was a review of the rules, which were again in Cristaldi's hands. Albertini's ideas were widely received, except for the title of the new institute. It was a sore point. Was there already resistance to the title, or was there an effort to forestall future resistance? The priests would continue to be called the Gospel Workers, even if they were promoting devotion to the Blood of Christ.

The prime virtue of the Workers was humility: with the

bishops, the pastors, the people, and also with "the roughest sort of people, treating them…as brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, recognizing that they were created in the image and likeness of God, and redeemed with the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ." It was the revolutionary virtue of *egalité*. Humility also was to govern the relationships among the Gospel Workers.

The second virtue was charity: a true and proper distinctive sign. "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:34-35). Living in community was a tangible sign of love. It was the virtue of *fraternité*, which establishes a blood relationship (*consanguineità*).

The third virtue was to be the spirit of interior and exterior mortification. Internal mortification aimed at reducing the passions, especially the predominant one, "because when one overcomes a predominant passion, one easily overcomes the others." External mortification involved moderation in eating and drinking. In community, the food eaten together was to be healthy but frugal. This was authentic *liberté*, emancipation from the slavery of the passions.

While Don Gaspar supported the work, he was reluctant to leave Rome. When Bonanni invited him to preach missions, he responded: "At the present time God wants me to have my missions at the Santa Galla Hospice." Despite this, he put pressure for maximum availability on others, including Bonanni, to whom he expected to give detailed instructions. In addition, Don Gaspar, while he foresaw mission houses everywhere, had in mind a role for himself in Rome. In fact he wrote to Cristaldi regarding the opening of Giano:

> Please work to obtain quickly a subsidy from the Datary to cover travel expenses and the other initial costs so that we can support the departure of these workers. I see this as

> something absolutely necessary. I know that some bishops show concern about this organization, but it is necessary that they follow the system set up in Giano, unless you judge that things must be handled otherwise. With my remaining in Rome, we shall work together for everything that will contribute to the solid founding and spread of so great an institute. (Letter 112)

Did Don Gaspar put himself forward for the role of coordinator of a work that looked like it was to be vast and complex? In reality, he was going along with an opportunity that had been dangled before him. He became more active in response to the clear support of Cristaldi and Albertini. In the opinion of Don Gaspar, Don Gaetano could go to Giano along with Don Adriano Giampedi, whom he was pressuring, and Don Nicola Tani. Perhaps also Don Pietro Sinceri would be available. As for the title, he suggested repeating the expedient by which they had gotten approval for the devotion. If Cristaldi would say something to the pope, and then the pope to Bonanni, that the priests now gathered in community were to be given the title of the Blood of Jesus, the matter could be considered closed.

This time, however, Cristaldi considered an intervention by an authority to be risky. He was interested in their forming a community. If pressure to give this community a specific name would cause it to fail, they would find themselves in serious trouble. Some in the Vatican offices were ready to find any pretext for tripping someone up.

Things stood this way when Napoleon regained power in France in March of 1815 after his escape from Elba. Pius VII fled to Genoa, anticipating the moves of Gioacchino Murat who, having aligned himself once again with his brother-in-law with this new turn of events, invaded the Papal States and was headed toward

France. From Rimini he launched his famous *Proclama*.[5] Cristaldi followed the pope and from exile sent his notes to Don Gaspar. This meant many activities were suspended, but Gaspar remained very busy with all his ministries. More than ever, he sensed that he was the essential figure in the nascent organization.

Napoleon's career finally came to an end with the defeat at Waterloo, but meanwhile three months of suffering had passed.

The first community in Giano was born without clarification of the question of the title. The members were called Missionary Priests or Secular Missionaries.

Even if he was reluctant to leave Rome, Don Gaspar had to leave for a few days to get everything ready. The house was formally opened on August 15, 1815, with Bonanni as superior and with Don Vincenzo Tani and Don Adriano Giampedi. The role of *economo* fell to Gaspar, but he was the true factotum of any enterprise.

Can one say that on that day at San Felice di Giano that the Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood were born? Cristaldi, Albertini and Gaspar would say "yes." For Bonanni and the others, things looked a bit different. Don Gaetano had accepted the devotion to the Most Precious Blood but held that the organization should continue to be called the Gospel Workers, even if he preferred the more generic title of "Missionary Secular Priests," precisely to avoid the idea of a true and proper religious institute.

With the arrival of Don Vincenzo Tani in September, 1815, Gaspar left San Felice and returned to Rome. The transfer of the house stipulated that at least three priests live in it. The arrangement was now in order. But shortly thereafter, Don Adriano Giampedi also left. Only Bonanni, Tani and two lay brothers remained in Giano. The situation was risky because the bishop of Spoleto, who had given up the property reluctantly,

[5] This was an invitation for Italians to join with him against Austria.

could have contested the contract, seeing that the conditions had not been met.

The situation now took a dramatic turn. Cristaldi, who had invested his reputation and his own future in the initiative, expected that Don Gaspar would hurry back to San Felice, but this did not happen. He confronted Gaspar, who apparently was not convinced. Gaspar went to great lengths to find someone to go, looking for someone to volunteer, but without recognizing the obvious: that he himself should return. He was unable to hear his own arguments, the arguments that he had used to convince others and overcome their resistance.

Such behavior must have annoyed Bonanni and the other Gospel Workers. Don Gaspar had a lot of his father in him, and this could be detrimental. Antonio del Bufalo, a cook in the Altieri Palace, had grand dreams and in his free time would organize festivals and popular games. He thought he would make a lot of money and instead suffered one failure after another. The characteristic self-promotion and incurable optimism of Gaspar became the object of ridicule.

Don Francesco was very much involved in this drama of his disciple. This young man had to become more mature. He saw the great advantages that Gaspar's presence in Rome could secure, but he also recognized the sound reasons of Cristaldi. The chapter of San Nicola was about to achieve the elevation of the Confraternity to that of an Archconfraternity. There was convincing evidence that this center of devotion and of the apostolate was close to the heart of the pope in a special way. The disagreement reached a delicate moment and threatened to dash the hopes of many. Don Gaspar would have to feel more personally involved, detaching himself from his own views and perhaps from his own family as well.

Like a sculptor who sees in the clay the creation that he

wants to extract, Don Francesco saw buried in Gaspar a saint and an artist. Albertini's firstborn had to set out on the way of the *filotapinosi* 'lover of humble things'.

On September 22, 1815, the pope granted indulgences to the Confraternity and four days later, on September 26, elevated it to the rank of Archconfraternity. On October 18, a new document granted additional indulgences. These were important recognitions that put the Archconfraternity in a new position. Now the Roman foundation could create branches in its own right and aggregate them to itself, exercising spiritual guidance and jurisdiction over them.

For example, if Cristaldi had wanted to aggregate the house of San Felice di Giano to the Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood, he could have done it, but he would have needed Bonanni's consent, since the property had been transferred to him. Bonanni and all the other missionary priests would have had to join the Archconfraternity and become its missionary promoters. These were not Albertini's intentions. He was pursuing other possibilities, and the stories whose threads had promised to become marvelously intertwined were suddenly at risk of interfering with one another.

Chapter 21
REFOUNDING

Cristaldi did more than anyone to establish the house in Giano, but it was Albertini who wanted to found the missionary priests of the Most Precious Blood. As for Bonanni, he believed that everything was now taken care of and that it was now a matter of responding to requests for preaching. It was a question of just rolling up one's sleeves, for the Gospel Workers had to be *workers,* dedicated to itinerant preaching. He was not interested in further discussion. For Cristaldi what was important was that these priests preach missions that would rouse the people of the Papal States and beyond.

For Albertini, it was essential that the young institute be formed of priests regularly inscribed in the Archconfraternity, provided with its credentials and committed to spreading the devotion through preaching and by establishing local associations. In the judgment of Don Francesco, it was possible to create a perfect blend of such disparate ideas in the Archconfraternity. He dreamed of a Church converted by the Gospel of the Blood. He considered that he was only at the first stage of an ongoing effort that would be part of the life of the Church for years to come. He knew that it was subversive, that it would shake things up. This is why he did not find it strange that a new institute dedicated to the spread of a devotion should be founded. This was not just any devotion, but *the* devotion. It was the soul of the Church.

Genuine Christian witness gives the highest place to the value of the human person. Human beings, in the Christian vision, are considered to be of such value that God became a human being to redeem them. The Son of God assumed the human condition and raised it to an unimaginable dignity. The greatest proof of this

is that the Son of God poured out his Blood to save each and every human being.

The adjective "most precious" in the title of the devotion obviously refers to the Blood of Christ but also revealed the value of the human person, because the Blood, that price, had been *paid* for humanity. The Blood of Christ reveals the worth of the human person because the value of a thing is measured by the price one is willing to pay to acquire it. The Blood of Christ was paid for each human being. It was the price of every human being, man or woman, slave or free, from whatever tribe, tongue, people and nation.

Now what was needed was to find a way of assuring that this price was not paid in vain. The Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood would spread this earthshaking message and the prayers of the Archconfraternity, creating a new culture in towns and cities. It was the true revolution, one that did not require blood but which gave it. A growing number of centers of devotion would create a network that could spread messages of reform. There would be social commitment, involvement of the laity, and general mobilization. This was the additional piece that the initiative of Bonanni was lacking. It was not just a matter of names or labels but a matter of substance.

Albertini could marshal reasons to favor his plan and to counter opposing opinions. It was said that to improve people you need a culture that fosters improvement. Albertini agreed. He had a passionate love for studies and sought initiatives to raise the cultural level of the clergy and the people. He would not agree with those who said: "What we need are schools and not sermons!" For him, Christian doctrine remained the true culture and sermons were the first "schools," because they were truly for the people and free of charge. A preacher could reach everyone. Piety and fear of God were inculcated by preaching and not in the schools.

This was certainly a generous and impassioned proposal, but it was not always necessarily true. One could object that not even sermons assure piety and fear of God. The papal administration, which included a large number of the clergy, had listened to sermons and even preached them. To what effect? Albertini was well aware of this and, precisely for this reason, he also relied on Christian piety, on groups of prayer, as a response to preaching.

The plans of Cristaldi and Albertini were getting bogged down because of the leadership of the house in Giano in the hands of Bonanni. A refounding became necessary, with the expectation that the foundation of San Felice di Giano would find its true soul by connecting with a house that would be established in Rome. This house could easily become the principal house. This would make San Felice a subordinate house. A house in Rome, or simply the Archconfraternity, once its jurisdiction was recognized, would be able to resolve all the issues and give Canon del Bufalo the role that had been predicted for him.

Cristaldi was not opposed to this project and saw the pressing need to fight for the Restoration. He wanted missionary teams of great preachers who would go throughout the Papal States, calling the people back to fidelity to the Church, which was understood as the treasury of eternal salvation as well as a temporal state. He was a firm advocate of the efficacy of religion, whether as an instrument for the elevation of humanity or for preventing disorders and violence. His support of Bonanni's initiatives was motivated by these convictions.

Over the course of the past twenty years many religious institutes had been suppressed and a great number of their former members were now out in society. Their identity and duties were not well defined. They were both men and women and included some priests. They all received a pension in

exchange for the benefits derived from their personal and collective property, which had been confiscated by the French government. The papal regime demanded a return to the status quo. It was not an easy project because there was an economic challenge: the patrimonies that supported the institutes had been sold or were now unproductive.

For example, there were thousands of abandoned convents that were in ruins. Few of the monks and nuns felt like returning to live within those ruins twenty years after they were forced to leave them. How could one restore real estate that was so deteriorated if the productive property of the convents had been sold or disbursed?

Cristaldi, who was attentive and capable in handling economic problems, wanted his men to carry out an important role in that scenario. He had already proposed two great missions and was considering others. He was thinking of an ongoing series of missions. He was convinced that this structure in the Church, once set in motion, would be an avalanche. Many clerics would be dedicated to the work of the missions. He wanted Don Gaspar to lead the charge.

Gaspar, however, was not prepared for the venture. He would never displease Cristaldi, but he was very reluctant to indulge Cristaldi's views without being quite frank in discussing his own reasons and his own projects, which were different.

"In this regard, venerable Monsignor, it is necessary that I, with due respect and in all candor, open up my heart to you. You know very well the just esteem that I have for the gifts that God has given to you and of how zealously you use them to procure greater glory to God. ...I would like to align myself with your most laudable intentions... [But] if it is God's will that this latter cannot presently be accomplished, what fault do I have?" (Letter 130). There follows a series of surprising and even disappointing

arguments, which biographers have always skipped over.[1] Even while stating that there could not be disagreements between Cristaldi's intentions and his own, Gaspar distances himself from them in the letter. The transformation of Gaspar's benefice was agreeable, but to be a worker in Rome full time he surely could not be running all over the Papal States. He asserted that he was not attached to the city, since staying there was a greater burden than going out to be a missionary. It was a matter of many projects. He would be able to go to Benevento after Lent. He could not abandon his own works or his own economic affairs in order to look after "the spiritual projects of others (*le altrui spirituali aziende*)."

For the third time, Albertini found himself faced with a check on the accuracy of a prophecy of Sister Maria Agnese regarding Don Gaspar. After Gaspar's nearly fatal illness at Piacenza and his desire to join the Jesuits, there was now a third and unexpected trial. As soon as Albertini became certain of the issue, he began to discuss it. His spiritual son had fallen into a truly profound crisis, for he regarded as "the projects of others" the missionary expeditions initiated by Cristaldi and perhaps the initiative of Giano as well.

Albertini believed that the moment had arrived for him to reveal to Don Gaspar the secret to which he had vaguely referred many times. He had to help his disciple accept his role. Perhaps at the moment Gaspar had already spoken to Cristaldi about it. Between the lines one can read a plan that differed from what was

[1] Colagiovanni states in a footnote that the problem is treated in greater detail in his biography of Gaspar del Bufalo, *Il Commediante di Dio*. He cites some hints found in the same Letter 130: "I never judge my own concerns by myself because I do not want to fall into the category of people *absque prudentia et consilio* 'without prudence or counsel'." In addition, the reason Gaspar gives for renouncing his desire to become a Jesuit could refer to Albertini's project in Rome: "I was bound by several commitments." Besides his personal projects, therefore, there could also be one linked to the Archconfraternity.

taking place in Rome. Perhaps Albertini emphasized the terms of the prophecy to make his case stronger. He had no need to invent anything. He only had to remain firmly convinced of what he had cherished for so many years.

Don Gaspar thus learned that the revelation of Sister Maria Agnese del Verbo Incarnato was not some generic announcement of a new institute, which could also have been that founded by Bonanni, but that it was more precise, envisioning Gaspar himself. What he considered to be a "spiritual project of others," had to be his own.

The conversation must have taken place sometime during 1816-1817. From then on there was a new phase of the story. But now we take a step back to follow the events in chronological order.

The missions planned by Cristaldi and blessed by the pope were many, but two could not be postponed because they had been agreed upon with the local authorities: Benevento and Frosinone. Both of these important cities of the papal territory were moral disasters that suffered from a great deal of violence. Cristaldi did not need to be convinced of the efficacy of the missions; he wanted to convince others. He believed that preaching could change the world. Gaspar finally gave in. The results confirmed Cristaldi's opinion.

The Benevento and Frosinone initiatives were not officially within the field of activity of the Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood, and Don Gaspar was not directing them. He did, however, distinguish himself quite clearly among the group of preachers because of his personal qualities, just as Cristaldi had foreseen. The latter hoped to gather a small and stable group that would be an incarnation of the same idea that had led to the formation of Giano and that would take a leading role in the field of the Reform. Don Gaspar, as the prelate had foreseen, began

little by little to accept the program, which was also in harmony with that of Albertini.

Faced with such prospects, Don Francesco, "now having arrived at the fulfillment of his desires," retreated to the background almost entirely, "doing good without showing it and, as far as he was able, doing it through the activity of others." Cristaldi became the true promoter of the operations, and Don Gaspar gave him regular reports. Albertini observed the events taking place happily and they continued to surprise him. The work was God's, and it was setting sail from the little harbor of Rome.

The same could not be said of the feminine institute that Albertini was pursuing with equal desire. Things were at a standstill because the foundress was awaiting the death of her husband. But even that circumstance became part of the plan of Providence. In the religious and political climate of Rome, the nature of the work was taking a new direction. Albertini, after conversations with Cristaldi, became convinced that what was now more urgent was a congregation devoted to teaching.

Albertini was not unfamiliar with problems in the schools of the day. He had some experience in this area, since he frequently visited monasteries dedicated to the teaching apostolate. Besides, his sometimes traumatic experiences in school had taught him a great deal.

Don Francesco supported the apostolate of education. For example, Sister Maria Luisa Breviglieri, who headed the Monastery of Saints Rufina and Seconda in Trastevere, wrote: "In our school we seek to instill in the souls of young people the true law of God, giving them the means to do so." According to the testimony of this sister, Don Francesco did much more. At his own expense, he organized a monthly retreat as well as annual spiritual exercises. To conduct the spiritual exercises in preparation for First

Communion, he enlisted some zealous priests and invited the mothers, sisters and the female friends of the first communicants to join in, so that it became a true mission for the entire quarter of Trastevere.[2] To encourage participation, he organized the distribution of alms and of gifts.

Albertini was doing much the same thing in other institutions of learning. That kind of apostolic work was foreign to his temperament; he was reluctant to surround himself with masses of people. He paid a price for this. He was forced to overcome his reluctance by the strength of his devotion to the Blood of Christ. He was grieved by the thought that the Blood, shed for many, was being treated as if it had never been shed at all.

This could not continue. The Blood of Christ was shed to the last drop. That people did not avail themselves of the Blood was a profanation, the greatest sin of humanity. Albertini wanted to give them a remedy, driven by the love of that Blood and at the same time by love of those for whom it was shed.

Albertini was aware of the power of the schools. We see this in an insightful expression in a document that he was working on during those months. In it he said that the school was "a most efficacious means" to communicate a good moral, civil and religious education and thus to make sure that the Blood of Jesus had not been shed in vain.

In his mind, Albertini was already looking ahead to those teaching sisters (*maestre*) who would work along with the Missionaries. He wanted them to have the same name that he had in mind for the contemplative branch: Adorers of the Most Precious Blood.

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[2] First communion often occurred at a later age than it does now, so the first communicants and their friends might have been twelve or thirteen years old.

Chapter 22
WOMEN IN THE FIELD

When Pius VII began the Restoration, he faced two pressing challenges: political dissent that challenged Church power, and ordinary violence, which was seriously affecting the economy. These two plagues were connected, since political dissent often had recourse to violence and ordinary violence also had a political significance that contributed to the crisis facing the system.

In the south of the Papal States common violence was predominant, whereas in the north, political dissent was more common. Some attributed the difference to unequal cultural levels of north and south, which left the people of the south intellectually unsuited for ideological disputes.

There was some truth in this, but it did not explain everything. The political authority of the pope benefited from that intangible spiritual power over his Catholic subjects, who were firmly rooted in their faith. It was truly difficult for one of the faithful, a subject of the pope's spiritual authority, to have a discussion about the pope's temporal authority. The faithful were more inclined to tolerate the dysfunctions of an imperfect administrative apparatus. This attitude was stronger in the south.

One cannot deny that the outbreak of banditry was caused by the legislation of the Republic that seriously damaged religious organizations like the confraternities by seizing their property. This aroused a great deal of anger among the members of those groups and triggered hatred against those who supported the new regime. Obligatory conscription was another provocation because it forced hundreds of young men to go into hiding to avoid fighting Napoleon's far-off wars. Obligatory military service had been unknown in the Papal States until introduced by the French.

In the Kingdom of Naples, on the other hand, the principal root of brigandage was the legitimist cause: that is, the cause of those who supported the house of Bourbon. Bands of brigands fought the French on behalf of the house of Bourbon, which had been toppled from power by the invaders. The case of Michele Pezza, called "Friar Devil" (*Fra' Diavolo*), was famous.[1] The king of Naples portrayed himself as a victim of his Catholic faith in order to identify with the heart of his people. The pope's situation was clearly different.

Violence was rampant along the great highways. One can imagine what was happening to wayfarers and stagecoaches along those roads, on lonely stretches or in wooded areas. The most favored area for the activity of the bandits became the hilly section along the border between Naples and the Papal States. In addition to the advantages offered by safe hiding places in forests and caves, the brigands were near the border between two distinct jurisdictions. If the forces of one state were hunting the bandits, they could simply enter the territory of the other state in order to break off the chase.

The king of Naples had sought to wipe out the draft dodgers in his kingdom. Many had found easy refuge in the Papal States. When the forces of the Roman Republic tried to do the same, the bandits retreated to the mountainous country near Gaeta. An accord between the hostile governments was impossible.

Pius VII had thought to cure the plague of banditry with a pardon. "All of us have something to be pardoned of. Therefore let the bandits return to their homes. They have committed crimes, looting, and carnal violence, but now let them start a different life." A deadline was established and a man suited for this vast operation was appointed: Doctor Gian Domenico Porta.

[1] *Fra' Diavolo* was a nickname for this famous leader of guerilla forces against the French in the Kingdom of Naples. He was not in fact a friar.

Albertini was in favor of clemency and agreed with the pope's initiative. His attitude flowed from meditating on the Blood of Christ. "While we were yet sinners Christ died for evildoers" (cf. Rom 5:8). The Blood is the price paid to ransom the guilty. What is important is the repentance of sinners, not their punishment. The state, especially the state of the Church, ought to welcome the sinner as a father welcoming a repentant prodigal son. Vengeance, even if in the name of justice, should not be exacted. The Precious Blood, already shed, demanded this. Shedding more blood would have meant that the shedding of Christ's Precious Blood was somehow not enough.

Those who recommended granting pardons envisioned they would be available to over a hundred prominent brigands. These came from various parts of the southern Papal States. It is a noteworthy figure, but the actual number of the delinquents was much higher, because the bandits took advantage of many secret supporters, a phenomenon known in Italian as *manutengolismo*, which might be translated as "the accomplice system."

The proposed reform did not work. There was widespread unemployment. Violence was habitual and blatant, and some dreamed of easy money. The chaos that gripped society led the criminals, who lacked other employment, back to crime.

This unfortunate outcome did not contradict Albertini's thesis, also strongly held by Cristaldi; rather it confirmed it. It was clear that the path of clemency was of no use on its own. It had to be sustained by a moral and social recovery that had not yet taken place. Promotion of a religious culture and the reception of sacraments were needed. The people had to be involved in educational activities such as the sodalities, which would provide for the ongoing formation of young people of both sexes, of parents and of the clergy. Such an all-pervasive effort would not be utopian if it were entrusted to a network of mission houses

and schools. Without such a network of support, and also without greater economic equality, sending people who had committed horrible crimes back to their homes would be of no avail. It would even pose a danger, since it would expose the criminals to acts of revenge for the damage they had caused. Returning such criminals to their homes could also push them into repeating their crimes out of necessity and inclination.

If, as Albertini proposed, the great resource of the Reform had to be religion, women could not be left out of the picture since they were the great educators of the faith. Women were excluded from jobs in public administration and political life (not only in the Papal States), but were regarded as having an important role in domestic life. Women were the great educators of the new generations: they were the links in the chain of transmission of values and of awakening the faith. He saw women as a powerful army. Not empowering them to act would be foolish.

He no longer thought of the role of the feminine branch of the Archconfraternity as caring for the sick or living a contemplative life. Now what was needed was to bring together women who could be educators, ideally working side by side with the Missionaries. Together they would provide a structure that would support the reform of behavior: the Missionaries with their preaching and the sisters with their teaching. It was not by chance that in many places people were calling for the institution of public schools for both boys and girls, to form core groups for a new society. Schools for girls were almost completely lacking. It was appropriate that they should come into being in the name of the Blood of Christ.

Don Francesco did not need to find another foundress. The Countess Caterina Bentivoglio was capable of the new task. She was even more suited to the role of educator than that of a nurse. She had a solid spiritual formation, the manners of a noblewoman

and could write well, as demonstrated by her editing of Albertini's work on humility. She was a wise and strict mother. She had all the needed qualities, especially if she could take to heart those beautiful maxims on humility that he had her study.

This new direction would be a better fit with Cristaldi's ideas since he was so occupied with the social and political realm. It is possible that the prelate himself contributed in a significant way to the change of direction. A good education was key to reform and Cristaldi understood that well.

Albertini drew up a collection of rules, commonly known as the "Fundamental Articles." The full title was: "The Fundamental Articles on which will be based the New Institute of Teaching Sisters (*Maestre*) Devoted to the Most Precious Blood."

These rules envisioned mobilizing women to help women, because "that Blood of eternal life, which is the infinite price of our Redemption, [was not] shed in vain." This was a refrain for Albertini, obsessed as he was with the mystical question of Christ: "*Quae utilitas in Sanguine meo?*'Of what use is my blood?' [Psalm 30: 10]."[2] In the first lines, he offered a vague reference to the reassessment of the institute from its original idea of caring for the sick. He then notes that education was taken on as the aim of the new institute insofar as it was held to be "a most efficacious means of realizing its purpose": to persuade young women to draw profit from the merits of the Most Precious Blood.

One can appreciate the concreteness of Albertini's plans and his desire for an institute that would offer an effective intervention in society. The new institute was to be made up of specialists. It would provide for three categories of teaching sisters, who would specialize in civil, religious, and spiritual education (*educazione devota*).

[2] This phrase occurs with some regularity in the writings of Saint Gaspar as well. He shared his mentor's concern that the Blood of Christ not be shed in vain.

What did Albertini mean by the civil education of women? "Every kind of work proper to a wise woman, modest and self-assured behavior, good manners, a method for correctly running a family." The objective was to "create an upright woman who was well versed in polished manners (*polizia esteriore*)." There was no explicit mention of reading or writing, but it was not excluded. Albertini appreciated a cultivated woman, as was the case with Countess Bentivoglio, and in practice, education would be broader than what was specifically mentioned in the *Articles*.

Religious education included doctrine or catechism, along with instruction on mental and vocal prayer. The girls were given lessons on the importance of the chief virtues. Of course, Albertini placed humility and charity at the pinnacle of virtues; they were needed by women as well as by men.

The teaching sisters who were involved in this work would run a house of spiritual exercises that would always be open: for the girls preparing for first Communion, for the young women who wanted to enter into discernment regarding a vocation to the religious life, for women who wanted to take a few days off for prayer, for mothers who wanted to renew the commitment to their state of life.

The sisters dedicated to spiritual education were completely occupied "in the functions of the church, in promoting the reception of the sacraments, in listening to the divine word, in the principal religious practices and above all in the affectionate and heartfelt devotion to Jesus Christ."[3]

The three categories of teaching sisters fit well with Albertini's and Cristaldi's intention to adopt a solution for reorganizing religious institutes of women. It was not always possible to reestablish the former communities, so an attempt was made to merge those that remained into various institutes

[3] This sounds very much like Gaspar's idea of a mission house.

according to their spirituality and lifestyles. The new institute, devoted to the Most Precious Blood and prepared for the education of women, would be able to absorb religious women from different backgrounds and help them to come together as a single family.

The teaching sisters of the three specializations would live a common life. The daily schedule was to foster unity without resulting in being "destructive of the special obligations of each of the classes." These religious women were to become an example of a renewed humanity. They were divided into oblates[4] and professed. The oblates were testing their vocation. and the professed were members by virtue of solemn vows, which were not taken before the age of thirty.

Each house would have seven directors. "No more, no less," ruled Don Francesco, who once again revealed his weakness for numbers. Seven, because they were witness of "the seven bloodsheddings of Jesus Christ." The directors would have a consultative and deliberative vote in administrative meetings (*congressi direttivi*).

The primary house, according to the *Fundamental Articles*, was also to have seven directors who would have jurisdiction over the other houses in addition to governing the primary house. Every three years, the houses were to be visited by a Missionary of the Archconfraternity to ensure observance of the rule.

The formulation of the *Fundamental Articles* anticipated women entering the field of apostolic work. Women were to

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[4] An oblate (from the Latin *oblatus* 'one who has been offered') in this context refers to a person who has not taken vows but who voluntarily lives according to the rule of a religious institute. The term has been used in a variety of senses over the centuries and today commonly refers to all members of some religious orders (for example, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate) or to lay associates of a religious order.

become holy in order that the Blood of Jesus would not have been shed in vain for them, but they were also to be committed to assuring that it had not been shed in vain for others. Women, therefore, would enter the field with the same resolve as men, impelled by the same powerful idea, but working in different areas.

At first this was only an idea, awaiting the right time and place. This feminine institute, according to Albertini's plans, was entrusted to his firstborn daughter Caterina Bentivoglio Orsi, just as he had entrusted the masculine institute to his firstborn son Gaspar. He saw that his withdrawal from the endeavor was near so that he could devote himself to something else and retreat into the background. A good father raises children who can walk by themselves.

Something new was being introduced with the idea of the women of the third class or division of the sisters. They would administer the church of the religious house, carry out duties there, promote the reception of the sacraments, and listen to God's word. This was not a traditional role for women. They would be ministering; not in the house, but in the church, which had been the exclusive province of men. It introduced the idea of a woman in a leading role (*protagonismo femminile*), something quite new, which only a simple man, and one gifted with an innocent courage, could adopt. Albertini's thoughts were perhaps a bit naïve and he was unaware of the possible consequences.

The problem would be to find the right woman to embody his ideas and to gather women to work along with her. Don Francesco thought about placing his own niece, Maria Giuseppa Pitorri, together with the foundress. Don Gaspar considered the possibility of involving his own sister-in-law, Paolina, and his niece, Luigia.

Albertini took a decisive step for the masculine branch on December 27, 1817, when he conferred on Gaspar the title of "First

Promoter and Missionary of the Archconfraternity." This signaled that the spiritual cultivation of his disciple had come to an end, and that Albertini's ideas about the work had reached maturity.

Now Gaspar was aware of the weight upon his shoulders. Certainly Albertini had entered into a pact with him like that which he had made with Sister Maria Agnese. There were consequences to this.

On one occasion, Gaspar left for a mission without the authorization of the director. Albertini did not speak to him for several days. He put no stock in the explanations that Don Gaspar attempted to give. Only when he decided that the time was proportionate to the breach did he begin to speak to him again.

This could seem to be rather excessive behavior, difficult to square with his kind and patient personality. Don Francesco could be inflexible, and in this case, he was certain that Gaspar needed to moderate his egocentrism and lessen his inclination to seek the center stage. He had to be as malleable as iron on the anvil.

In April of 1818, the young Missionary departed for a series of missions like a new man. He gained two followers, secured the foundation at San Felice, and began to form a true missionary company. The foundation that began in 1815 now was undergoing a second founding. This was all the more true since among the two followers he had won was Don Biagio Valentini, a priest exceptionally devoted to the apostolate and in many ways similar to Albertini.

In a skillful move, Don Gaspar assigned him to San Felice di Giano, guaranteeing that the house would remain faithful to the spirit of the new institute.

Chapter 23
AN EXPERIMENTAL DIOCESE

The southernmost diocese of the Papal States was located along the western coast and was a merger of the dioceses of Terracina, Priverno and Sezze, three illustrious cities. Some of the events sung by Vergil in the *Aeneid* took place in the area. Terracina had 5000 inhabitants with three parishes; Priverno, 4000 with five parishes; Sezze, 6000 with six parishes. The surrounding villages had a population of 10,000.

The diocese was not unlike those nearby. It consisted of small churches burdened with problems, entrusted to a clergy who could be petty and half-hearted.

Terracina had a chapter with twelve canons, including one of high rank. More substantial was the chapter of Priverno, with fifteen canons and one of high rank. The chapter of Sezze had fifteen canons, among them three of high rank. Terracina was one of the two ports of entry into the Papal States on the southern border with the Kingdom of Naples. Terracina hosted some administrative offices and the place saw a lively traffic that the other cities did not.

Terracina was situated on the side of the mountain along the Via Appia. Except for the white-collar workers and a modest class of fishermen, the economy was in crisis. Brigandage made the mountains unsafe. The pastures were bare and the swamp covered much of the countryside. Malaria epidemics made the otherwise impressive site unattractive.

Pius VI had invested a great deal to reclaim the area covered by the Pontine Marshes in the hope of bringing glory to his family, the Braschi, but the project was impeded by historical

events.[1] The Palazzo Braschi was evidence of the efforts on the part of the pope. It made up a great part of the city of Terracina. Regarding the cultural level of the inhabitants, a curial official in 1815 wrote: "Education has been in great decline in Terracina, and the clergy are now reduced to nothing in that city and adjacent areas."

Since 1805 the bishop was Monsignor Francesc'Antonio Mondelli, a Roman with ties to Albertini, who had probably been his spiritual director. Mondelli had sent the cleric Luigi Locatelli to Rome; Locatelli had studied there with Gaspar del Bufalo and, once ordained in 1808, had committed himself to the Gospel Workers. In the early months of 1815 the bishop was transferred to Civita Castello. Before leaving his see, he called Locatelli back to his home town and entrusted him with many important assignments.

Locatelli returned with a heavy heart since he had been involved in several projects. He was counting on an academic career at the Collegio Romano where he had been teaching for two years. He also wanted to become a Jesuit. At the prospect of getting trapped in Terracina, he threatened to become a missionary to the Indies.

Locatelli, while at least momentarily put off from the idea of following Saint Ignatius, now had many tasks to accomplish. Albertini and Cristaldi had envisioned the projects and they were similar to those that Gaspar would later undertake. Locatelli founded the Sisters of Charity, an institute dedicated to the caring

[1] Pius VI was born into the noble Braschi family of Cesena. His efforts at draining the marshes were unsuccessful, and the project was finally realized more than a century later under Mussolini. Pius was the last of the popes who practiced nepotism, building the Palazzo Braschi in Rome for his nephew. The palazzo now houses the Museo di Roma. He also built the palazzo of the same name in Terracina.

for the sick. They were to "provide for the spiritual or temporal assistance of poor sick persons, those victims of misery and neglect who many times go on to die." He had promised to open a seminary and had started a foundation of teaching sisters and a hospital. He had Cristaldi's support in all of these initiatives.

Mondelli's successor, Monsignor Francesco Saverio Pereira, also a Roman with ties to Bonanni, came from Santa Maria in Trastevere.[2] He knew Albertini well, at least from the time of their imprisonment together in Corsica. On arriving in his see, he had given his full approval to Locatelli's efforts. How could there be a doubt that calling Locatelli back to Terracina was not part of what Cristaldi and Albertini had wanted in order to prepare for the arrival of the Missionaries of the Archconfraternity?

Was there a problem with brigandage in Terracina and its environs? The missions and schools would prove that violence could be extinguished without recourse to police repression and special laws. Albertini's idea became Cristaldi's map. The latter also appreciated the economic and moral advantages of the project. If one could succeed in giving a concrete demonstration to such evangelical ideas, many thousands of scudi would be saved. What would have been spent would be used in a way more consistent with the nature of the papal government. If matters turned out well it would also be very favorable to his career.

In order to fully realize such a project, it was not enough to have a superficial involvement in the problems. Monsignor Pereira was not doing enough to respond to the situation. Although he had been in the diocese for only four years, he had to be removed.

Perhaps at one time Cristaldi had thought about appointing del Bufalo bishop of Terracina, but then he reflected that for Don Gaspar, only thirty-three years old, such an

[2] One of the great churches in Rome located in Trastevere, a section of Rome west of the Tiber and south of the Vatican.

appointment would be too great a trial. Appointing him bishop would have limited the dynamism of that "spiritual earthquake" and could have made the difficulty with the clergy of Terracina worse. Albertini, with his consummate wisdom, irrepressible good nature, persuasiveness and prudent firmness, was the ideal person for the job. Gaspar supported Cristaldi's choice.

The matter was presented to a reluctant Albertini as the direct wish of the pope. Don Francesco put up a strong defense of his position. Don Gaspar stood his ground, with his characteristic stubbornness.

Among Albertini's reasons for saying no was poverty. Becoming a bishop involved about a thousand scudi in expenses and he, as usual, had no money. A thousand scudi was an enormous sum. At the time a bishop-elect would take on the expense, but he generally regarded the episcopate as an investment. A bishop officiated at confirmations and other occasions that offered stipends; otherwise, he would remain at the episcopal residence or be involved in matters that were more financially rewarding, treating the diocese as if it were a church benefice (*una commenda*). Albertini did not intend to take that course. He would inevitably end up in a sea of debt.

Don Gaspar responded that Cardinal Alessandro Mattei, a supporter of Albertini's candidacy, would obtain a reduction in the amount and would loan him the money. Mattei was the bishop of Velletri and was also the protector of the seminary opened by Locatelli in Terracina.

On leaving Albertini's house on March 2, 1819, del Bufalo sent Cristaldi a note in which he indicated that he had succeeded in strengthening Albertini's spirit of acceptance, according to "the proper ideas of conformity to the divine will." He overflowed with sincere praise for the bishop-elect: "... His Holiness, in making this selection, will be particularly consoled since it is one of the best

that anyone could make. I rejoice because I see this as a reward and an exaltation of the virtue of a man for whom any praise would be too little. I know him very well and how outstanding he is. In him there is a rare, scarcely ever seen wisdom, a very special holiness and a maturity of judgment in his actions" (Letter 202).

Don Francesco's house had always been crowded with priests. When news of this candidacy for the episcopate spread, however, they kept their distance. Don Giuseppe Visconti, who found him alone one evening, asked him, "What has happened?"

Don Francesco responded with a quotation from the Gospel, which had also become indicative of the state of his heart at that moment: "*Omnes relicto eum fugierunt*.[3] One must give adoration to the judgments of God…I would prefer that at my death it would be said of me: 'A poor priest has died.'"

Gaspar would not have been able to attend the first date set for the episcopal ordination since he was committed to a series of missions in the Marches. He and Albertini then went to Cardinal Mattei, who was appointed to confer the ordination, to ask that he change the date. The cardinal consented and the ordination was set for the Sunday after Easter, April 18, in the chapel of the Archconfraternity.

Albertini made the spiritual exercises in preparation for the episcopal ordination in the Passionist Convent of Saints John and Paul.[4] Locatelli was also invited to the retreat. Gaspar was present there and, in virtue of his role as propagator of the devotion, gave the priest from Terracina the "license" (*patente*) of a missionary, one of the first. By order of the bishop the secretary was notified of the appointment. The diocese was becoming "territory of the Most Precious Blood."

[3] This is a reference to Matthew 26: 56, which in the Vulgate reads, in part: "*discipuli omnes relicto eo fugerunt*" 'all the disciples, leaving him, fled.'

[4] Gaspar also made several retreats there and was good friends with a Passionist saint, Vincenzo Strambi.

The clergy of the three dioceses hurried to send letters of congratulations to the bishop-elect. His response is found in a letter of March 19 addressed to the procurator of the cathedral, Don Francesco La Galla. The new bishop writes: "I received your most kind letter from Sezze dated the 15th of this month. The expressions of love and congratulations in the letter, signed in the name of the most reverend Chapter of your city and diocese, were most appreciated, and I am truly grateful. God has chosen me for the august ministry of bishop and may he make me fulfill this burdensome task with exactness! I cannot wait to be among you, my brothers, and to embrace you in the Lord; I hope that this moment may not be far off. Please have your esteemed colleagues accept these sentiments of mine and the love and esteem with which I write this letter."

Locatelli participated in various meetings with Cristaldi and Albertini. Every time Canon del Bufalo was mentioned with great admiration by Cristaldi, Albertini would add: "Monsignor, it's a vocation! God is calling him for the extraordinary path of preaching and missions." The mutual enthusiasm of Cristaldi and Albertini for the young Gaspar grew stronger. They hoped that Locatelli might follow the same path.

Albertini's episcopal ordination was an opportunity to glorify the Archconfraternity. Magnificent hangings decorated the church of San Nicola in Carcere. The miraculous crucifix was surrounded by many lights and beautiful candelabras. "The chapter of the deaconry, the missionaries and many priests, a great many of whom were his penitents, assisted at the ceremony." It was not forgotten that Albertini was dean of the clergy and was also an examiner of the clergy. "In a separate area were the oblate sisters with their pupils of Santa Rufina in Trastevere, where Albertini was director, and many distinguished gentlemen were in the chapels. The crowd in the church kept growing so that no one was able to

get in. There were soldiers stationed at the doors and inside the church so that people would not make noise."

One might think that Albertini involuntarily made himself a candidate, either by his ideas about the plan in general or by extolling its possible effects in the violent territories. A penitent, Sister Matilde Datti, who probably had taken the place of Sister Agnese in his heart, has left us testimony to that effect. She states that Don Francesco told her: "The more the devotion to the divine Blood extends like a deluge of mercy on the land, the more quickly God's mercies will arrive. A great punishment of the wicked will take place, with little blood shed by good people. Faith in Jesus Christ will revive in good people by means of sensational miracles, and many holy souls, hidden to the world, will manifest themselves for the greater glory of God in that epoch, in such a way that one will see the likes of [St.] Vincent Ferrer and [St.] Anthony of Padua rise up, and many provinces, islands and kingdoms will be converted to the faith."

This was an old conviction of his, and it was that conviction that led him to see Bonanni, del Bufalo, and Locatelli as promising priests like St. Vincent Ferrer and St. Anthony of Padua. Albertini foresaw missionaries going into the whole world with the vessel of the Blood of Christ. "The missions of the Most Precious Blood," he would say, "will be in great demand by many people with eyes filled with tears, especially by those in the city of Bologna. In those missions great prodigies and marvels will take place, on account of which there will not be room in the Institute to receive the great crowd of those wishing to join in the work."

The prophecies of Albertini were the expressions of an optimist, the fruit of a vision of the future according to God's plans, whose plans were realized when men and women worked together with God's designs. They frequently failed because the prince of this world is the enemy of the good.

A month before the episcopal ordination of Albertini, Monsignor Pereira was assigned to the see of Civita Castello. He left the see with some sort of sour polemic, and his actions revealed his great irritation, undoubtedly due to his transfer and hostility toward his successor. The ambitious project – to resolve the problem of brigandage with clemency – was already dividing the administration into hawks and doves and was stirring up among those very doves a struggle to be in the game.

It is quite certain that the episcopal ordination of Albertini and his assignment to the see of Terracina would be part of a program of improving morals in which missions of the Most Precious Blood would play a part. Antonio Santelli states this clearly when he writes that the new bishop was chosen for the see of Terracina "because that part of the province of Marittima and of Campagna, both bordering on the Kingdom of Naples, were so infested with such completely lost souls who, like irrational wild animals, reduced all order to a shambles."

The appointment was also due to the fact that Pius VII was convinced "that the weapons of Religion were the only valid means to offer an effective remedy in those areas where temporal weapons can never reach." It was Cristaldi who instilled this conviction in the pope.

After so much intellectual work it was now the moment for decisive action. Gaspar's moment was drawing near. In his prophecy to Sister Maria Dotti, Don Francesco had also said that the plan "would be carried out by Canon del Bufalo, who, with the institute and with counsel, will serve as the strong arm of the reform that is so longed for. God will give him the gift of prophecy and of miracles. He will die with a weapon in hand and they will say: 'The trumpet of the Most Precious Blood has died!' All this will happen under a great pontiff who will give peace to the world in a way that *erit coelum novum et terra nova*

'there will be a new heaven and a new earth' for the temporal order."

Small before his firstborn son, small before his firstborn daughter, minuscule before the tree of the Archconfraternity that God in his pure mercy had planted, Monsignor Albertini, with a play on words with his own name, placed a tree on his episcopal crest[5] and next to the tree, a baby.

[5] The Italian word for tree is *albero*.

Chapter 24
A PIONEER BISHOP

Monsignor Albertini wanted to leave immediately and was anxious to be free for his work in the diocese. But ten days after the ordination, the archpriest of Terracina, Don Gaetano Sanguigni, sent a disappointing message to Don Luigi Locatelli in Rome asking that the new bishop delay departure for his see. "My wish would be that our most worthy bishop hasten here, but you should know that Monsignor Pereira [the previous bishop], in collusion with Mr. Filippo Bianchi, has even taken the keys with him," the archpriest wrote. "I also found, the bishop's residence to be a real pigsty." Indignant, the archpriest had invited the governor and key citizens to view the damage, and they were astounded. Bishop Pereira had also "removed bricks," the archpriest continued. "I have therefore put two bricklayers to work."

Why did Bishop Pereira act this way? He likely did not accept being removed from the diocese only three years after being installed. He had purchased some items to fix up the residence and was hoping to enjoy the fruits of his work. Perhaps Pereira was not pleased that someone else would take over the project and would get the recognition, state financing and career advancements. His transfer would certainly be interpreted as due to a lack of zeal in carrying out the mandate he had received.

Albertini left Rome on May 8, 1819, with his domestic servant Giovanni Menicucci and with Locatelli. He was respectably dressed. His friends had seen to this. If it were up to him, he would have presented himself in the diocese in his single set of clothing. His bearing and his entourage had nothing of the triumphalism that prevailed in similar circumstances. Many expressed their regrets at the loss of Albertini in Rome. Monasteries would be deprived of a wise director, parishioners

would be deprived of an apostle, the poor of a father, and priests of a point of reference.

The greatest loss was for the clergy of Rome. There was a good reason that he was headed to Terracina, where a less-than-enthusiastic clergy would be called on to initiate a new project in a short time. The populations of the three dioceses, in the mind of the new bishop, were to become the new people of Israel within the Church: a sign for all the dioceses in the world. In Velletri the little procession made its first stop. Cardinal Alessandro Mattei, who had consecrated Albertini, told him that the bishop's palace was always at his disposal on trips to and from Rome. The territory of the bandits began immediately to the south, but it was not unusual for them to show themselves around the city. At Velletri, members of the curia recounted various episodes and strategies. Albertini affirmed his trust in the power of the Blood of Christ.

After celebrating Mass the following day, he continued toward the deadly Pontine Marshes, traveling along the Via Appia, that famous road now infamous because of the frequent attacks on travelers, either by criminals or by malaria-bearing mosquitoes. Albertini's carriage was escorted by soldiers, both to honor the prelate and for security. Malaria was also a concern of Pius VII, who had advised the new bishop to take care of his health and to come back to Rome as soon as possible

Sezze was the first area of his diocese that he encountered on the journey. The people went down to meet their pastor at the Foro Appio. Here they paid their respects and received his blessing. The prominent people of the city invited the bishop to a lavishly appointed table. It was time to eat, and Albertini accepted the invitation, but his pastoral heart was more interested in the people than in the exquisite food they offered.

The welcome given by the people of Terracina was no less cordial. They went out to meet him en masse. Many mounted

horsemen had met him at Sezze to take him on from there. The procession grew larger, because their colleagues in Sezze also accompanied the bishop as far as Terracina.

The city was small but rich in history and interesting monuments. It was rich as well for the sea and for the beautiful waterway of the reclamation canal that flowed into it, named after Pope Sixtus V.[1] Everyone had come to the Porta Romana. The arrival of the procession at the spectacular piazza, before the stairs of the cathedral, was slowed because of the great enthusiasm of the people. Their jubilation was expressed by the singing of the *Te Deum* in the church dedicated to Saint Peter the Apostle and Saint Cesarius.

The new bishop and his entourage remained in Terracina for five days. The episcopal residence was in a very beautiful location, but the Palazzo Braschi, built by Pius VI, had partially obstructed the view toward the valley. From the upper terrace one viewed a flat but truly marvelous landscape. The sea and the plain grew gradually less distinct as they receded into the distance. The countryside was scored by canals, some quite straight and others twisting like glittering snakes. The mountain of Circeo, rising steeply from the blue mist that blended earth and water, seemed like an island, like a kind of Corsica. The thought could not but take him back to the years of exile. Was a new exile beginning for him? The distance from Rome weighed on him, but nearly unlimited freedom opened before him. An entire diocese was fully entrusted to him. Hitherto inconceivable opportunities were opening up for the growth of the Archconfraternity.

The poetic soul of Albertini was enchanted by the nearby sea, which gave him such ready access to God. Three years of exile

[1] Sixtus was pope from 1585-1590. During his brief reign he undertook many public works, including the reclamation of the Pontine Marshes. That project was abandoned after his death.

had given him a familiarity with the sea. It was like the sky turned upside down: one would see it from nearly everywhere in the city and it formed the background of every view into the distance.

It seemed impossible that such a magnificent paradise, a jewel of nature and of history, would not be a happy one. Two deadly dangers lurked: malaria and crime. Criminal activity was not confined to those murderers in the mountains but could also be found among the inhabitants, even among the clergy.

Many priests and their families had occupied themselves with their own affairs during the turbulent events of the Roman Republic and afterwards. They had bought and sold dishonestly for the benefit of their families and friends. Some civil servants took the pensions of deceased coworkers. Public officials pretended to be pastors and would attest that the deceased were still living in order to seize their stipends or annuities.

The profiteers were quite alarmed by the strong moral tone that the episcopate of Albertini presented. The continuing calls for conversion became the objects of mockery, and a strong opposition was developing. Hostile voices were raised against a "program of holy water."

Albertini refused to use the dining room of the bishop's residence because it was too showy. He preferred to take his meals in a modest room, like the poor pastor of a village. In the following days, he visited all the institutions of the city, in particular the monastery of the teaching sisters founded by Canon Locatelli. He wanted to invite Countess Bentivoglio to the convent in order to implement fully the project he had been planning for so long. At the head of the foundation was a woman from Segni, Teresa Priori, who was about 60 years old. The bishop encouraged her and offered a few words about future development.

He then went to Sezze, to take possession of the second cathedral, dedicated to the Annunciation. There he preferred to

take two small rooms in the seminary, at the time the only one for the three dioceses, instead of lodging in the bishop's house. He met with the students and had an affable conversation with them. He ate the same food as was served in the seminary the entire time he stayed there. He chose to act in a similar fashion when he took possession of the see of Priverno

The clergy and people soon became aware that a new wind was blowing in the diocese, and a series of events confirmed this. Albertini was convinced that respect for the law would lead to the triumph of justice and that charity would flourish once justice was established. He was further convinced that after a period of upheaval, even his adversaries would be convinced that the pursuit of goodness was good for everyone.

At Sezze there were two men who harbored a deadly hatred for one another. Albertini called them together and sought to make peace. When one resisted, the bishop said to him: "Come on, imagine that I am your rival. He will now do what you ought to do!" Saying this he threw himself onto his knees to "ask his pardon. That was enough. The two rivals dissolved in tears, embraced one another with a genuine demonstration of emotion, and swore that they would live in peace with one another forever."

At Priverno, "a few moments after his solemn entrance, he told the vicar that there were four persons in that city who, with their evil and scandalous life, were the cause of others falling into immorality." The vicar knew nothing, but Albertini offered names and addresses. He ordered that the four be imprisoned within the hour. The order was carried out punctually, and the episode made people understand Albertini's temperament: pious, humble, modest, but also "inflexible" when it came to God's interests. Many were convinced that tough times were ahead.

From Sezze Albertini returned to Terracina. He reviewed everything that had been done recently. Don Luigi Locatelli, as we

have seen, was a key figure in the diocese, and Albertini appointed him to be his personal secretary. Locatelli held a very important and delicate office because, when the bishop had to return to Rome, Locatelli would remain in the diocese to interpret the wishes of the bishop.

Monsignor Albertini once again turned his attention to the convent of the teaching sisters. Teresa Priori was an educated and very talented woman. She was enthusiastic about the bishop and she even dedicated a poem to the new shepherd of the diocese.

The poem was sung during a performance in honor of the new bishop. A copy was given to the prelate with the dedication: "As a sign of genuine esteem, [your] most humble servant Maria Agnese Priori." We do not know if Priori knew that another prospective foundress was on the way when she wrote those words.

The new bishop considered this effort of Locatelli to be the first foundation of the *Maestre Devote del Preziossismo Sangue* or the "Teaching Sisters of the Most Precious Blood." On at least one occasion, while speaking to the religious of the monastery, Albertini clearly stated "that he wanted to erect the first House of his Institute in the diocese of Terracina," and that it would be dedicated to the Most Precious Blood. He gave Locatelli the *Fundamental Articles*, probably an abridged edition of the *Articles* proper. He also spoke about his spiritual son, destined to accomplish great things, with Sister Maria Agnese. This affected her so much that, without ever having met Don Gaspar, she sent him a letter indicating the desire to aggregate her own institute to the Archconfraternity.

The problem was this: could the bishop change the title and the foundress without hurting some feelings and special interests? In a certain sense, he was running into the same problem that he had experienced with Bonanni. The beginnings seemed to be promising, but now the chess pieces stood firmly

within their squares on the board. He had to move those stubborn pieces, however, and with Cristaldi in Rome and del Bufalo at his side, he had a force sufficient to carry out God's plans.

When the bishop went to Rome on June 2, Don Gaspar was preaching a mission in Apiro, which was to be followed by a number of missions and retreats in other areas. Cristaldi had a particular interest in these missions, because he wanted to show that the missions were effective even with the Masonic sects.

Albertini had chosen quarters in Rome "outside the Porta Celimontana."[2] Through extensive correspondence, he followed the developments of the various arrangements in the diocese. Locatelli went to Rome from time to time to confer in person with his bishop and to report back his wishes to the diocese.

From the letters arriving from the diocese, the bishop could quickly form a more realistic understanding of the difficulties that awaited him. The see cities were in conflict with one another, and there was also conflict among the priests.

Two brothers, Don Cristoforo and Don Salvatore Di Trento, were powerful. Don Cristoforo, the penitentiary,[3] lorded it over others in the cathedral, in the College, and in the public school. Don Salvatore, the treasurer of the cathedral, gave the faithful reason to complain because of some apparent financial irregularities. As treasurer of the College, he had sold some property to retire a debt. The College had been closed for two years and the creditors sought the balance. What happened to the money realized from the sale?

[2] This gate in the Servian Wall, built in the fourth century BC, is generally identified with the Porta Dolabella on the Caelian Hill. The Caelian Hill is the site of the Baths of Caracalla and the churches of Saints John and Paul and the Passionist house next to it.

[3] A penitentiary was a priest who supervises the administration of the sacrament of penance in an area and who may also have the power to forgive certain reserved sins.

Things were not going better at Priverno. The administration of the property of the suppressed Monastery delle Canne in Sonnino, which Monsignor Albertini would have liked to transform into a mission house, was a hopeless tangle.[4] While some were receiving the profits, the poor sisters, who had been placed in other convents, were not receiving the subsidy granted them. The administrators of the property of delle Canne had also sold property with the pretext of retiring debts. The debts, however, remained, even after the sale of the property. All of Monsignor Pereira's demands that the administrators give an account of their management went unanswered. It would be up to Albertini to see to the matter.

Things had also gone badly for the other monasteries and convents of the diocese. The Cistercians had left Sonnino, the Jesuits had left Sezze, the Franciscans had left Sermoneta, the Trinitarians and Franciscans had left Terracina, and the Franciscans had left Maenza. Monsignor Albertini had an idea: to recover those properties abandoned by their respective institutes and put them at the disposal of mission houses and schools.

During Albertini's stay in Rome, the two strategies for the reform of the Papal States (that of the iron fist and that of a moral intervention) were pitted against one another in a growing conflict. It was not just two ideologies. Behind the haze of theory were significant financial interests. It was a matter of which strategy would get the funding. This does not mean that money was always the reason for the contention that arose. In both camps there were persons who were firmly convinced of the justice of their respective causes for the common good.

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[4] The monastery did become a mission house during the time the Missionaries were working with the bandits around Sonnino. The monastery was in ruins for many years and has finally collapsed, but the nearby church was restored by John Merlini and recently underwent another restoration.

The criminal behavior of those who had been granted amnesty in 1815 began to surface in 1816 or 1817. This led to the victory of the hardliners. When a new amnesty failed in 1818, the army triumphed. An edict of July 18, 1819, decreed the destruction of Sonnino, considered to be the homeland of brigandage, and the removal of its inhabitants to other areas.

The decree noted that the amnesties granted in the past had not achieved their purpose and that Sonnino was regarded as territory that harbored, and even encouraged, the bandits. It was certain that brigandage could not be eliminated if this nest were to continue to exist.[5]

This brutal measure was implemented at a particularly inopportune moment. Since it was decreed only a month and half from the new bishop's arrival in his diocese, it risked appearing that it was the result of his visit to the town. It was as if Albertini, on returning to Rome, had changed his mind about everything he had said and had advised the government to adopt such draconian measures. It would have been a terrible way to begin the spiritual governance which had been presented under the sign of mercy and reconciliation in the name of the Blood of Christ.

Was the edict the fruit of exasperation or a calculated measure? It certainly represented the most extreme form of a policy of the iron fist, which was opposed to the ideas of Albertini, Cristaldi and del Bufalo. At the time, Albertini and Cristaldi were deciding how to manage the diocese. The decision of the government undercut them and effectively reduced their programs to scrap.

Meanwhile, the people of Sonnino mobilized to have the order reconsidered. They went to the apostolic delegate in Frosinone and to the new bishop in Rome. Albertini turned to Cristaldi. Who better to get the right persons moving?

[5] Colagiovanni here quotes a lengthy excerpt from the actual text of the decree.

The first houses were now being leveled, prompting appeals for mercy. The demolition was suspended temporarily to await further reflection on the situation. Even the tolerant Consalvi was amazed that so many persons were mobilized to seek leniency, which had been freely granted until that point. But the solution was not pure and simple moderation. Clemency had to be accompanied by measures of a structural nature, just as the episcopacy of Albertini was promising to do.

The pressure of Cristaldi, Albertini and others led to the suspension of the demolition of Sonnino. The reprieve was opportune since it meant that the return of the bishop to the diocese, along with the planned missions, would take place in a more promising atmosphere.

Chapter 25
THE BISHOP AND THE SECRETARY

The virtual presence of Monsignor Albertini in Terracina was guaranteed by Don Luigi Locatelli. He claimed to be faithful to the bishop to whom he was subject, not wishing anything other than to follow his directives. He admired that holy man who was his bishop, but it seems that he was not too enthusiastic about how his own plans were progressing. The bishop arrived with programs that were too precisely defined, that were given precedence over Locatelli's, which were already well along. His initiatives would inevitably become those of the bishop, after he had spent about four years of work and, as he said, a great deal of money.

In the matter of the monastery, for example, he was not unaware that it was Albertini's intention to bring his "firstborn daughter," Countess Caterina Bentivoglio, to Terracina; nor was he unaware that Albertini would be opening mission houses of his "firstborn son" in all three sees. Many of the resources Locatelli was scraping together for his own projects would inevitably be diverted to the mission houses. He understood, however, that there was no way out of this. Locatelli was beginning to understand fully what was involved in the project.

In the name of the Archconfraternity, the project in Terracina was being joined to the initiative in Giano. There would be a bridgehead in the north and one in the south, with the center in Rome. Locatelli's role would be marginal. There was a weakness in Albertini's method. He would move into institutions that had already been founded, expecting that he could incorporate them into his own plans for the Archconfraternity of the Blood

of Christ. It was as if he expected that everyone would share in that *filotapinosi* or "love of humble things," in which he was so advanced.

From his residence in Rome, Albertini signed two important notices, one related to the College and the other announcing the missions. In the first, dated October 7, recognizing that "the moral and civic public education of youth" had potential influence on the "spiritual and temporal good of the population," expressed the desire and the will to "administer effective means to attain such a noble end." He determined that within the year the College in Terracina would be reopened. The notice was countersigned by Locatelli as the bishop's secretary and re-founder of the College in the preceding years.

Gaspar returned to the scene in Rome in mid-October. Albertini went to meet him. He wanted to have his secretary Locatelli with him and had summoned him from Terracina. The bishop thought it of vital importance that there be an understanding among his two most important collaborators. He considered Don Luigi to be like a second spiritual son. A complete understanding between Don Gaspar and Don Luigi was hindered by their incompatible natures.

That same evening Don Gaspar made an overall report of what had been accomplished. In the days that followed, he filled in the details for the bishop. Albertini loved to work in a group. Together they studied the mission in the minutest detail, the mission that was to inaugurate his episcopacy properly. The result of the meeting was a printed notice to the faithful of the three dioceses, dated October 23 and substantially drafted by Gaspar.

Announcing his imminent return to Terracina, Albertini asserted: "The heavy burden of the episcopal ministry imposes a serious obligation. One day we must give an account to the eternal divine Judge for the flock entrusted to us. This gives us a

heartfelt and lively desire to provide that flock with every means of acquiring eternal salvation. But what means could be more effective in shaking sinners from their deep sleep, … to encourage the lukewarm, to animate the cowardly, to make even holier the just, than to promote the Holy Missions in our dioceses? Be consoled, O venerable brothers, O beloved sons, in this message of peace, which this ministry brings to you! From all your hearts will be formed a single heart in the adorable side of Jesus Christ. The Blood of the innocent Lamb will reconcile us with the eternal Father, and the holy fire of the love of God will thus purify our souls, which will become a burning furnace of charity."

Continuing, the bishop outlined the schedules. "On November 8 at the 21st hour[1]" the missions in Terracina would begin. Then the missions would continue in the other two dioceses "in a way that all souls entrusted to us will be able to profit easily by holy grazing on the divine word."

The bishop ordered special prayers and penances in preparation for the mission. His language was austere and solemn: "…let gambling (*giuochi*) be banished along with inappropriate conversations; let each breathe in holiness and recollection in God the Father of mercies and the Lord of all consolation. Finally, you venerable brothers, ministers of Jesus Christ, weep with your father within the vestibule of the altar and direct your suppliant voices to the throne of divine clemency, repeating often those holy words: *Parce Domine, parce populo tuo* 'Spare, O Lord, spare your people'."

[1] At this period in Italian history, time was generally computed by the "Italian method" of telling time. According to this practice, the hours began with the *Ave Maria* hour, about a half hour before sunset. This method is almost always the one used by Gaspar in his letters. In this case, if the sun set at about 5 o'clock in the evening, the 21st hour would probably be in the early afternoon. It was only in 1846 that astronomical time as used today was made official in the Papal States by Gregory XVI.

Finally, he announced that every class of persons would be "cultivated with the divine voice" which would be explained by subsequent communications. Above all, he expected the conversion of the clergy, so that after the mission they "would be entrusted with the renewed vineyard of Jesus Christ."

Uppermost in Albertini's thoughts was surely the foundation of the feminine institute. It was high on the agenda of both Albertini and del Bufalo. Gaspar wrote to Priori, or rather he replied to a letter of hers which spoke of her ardent desire to become a member of the Archconfraternity, telling her to remain quietly in the monastery. "In the meantime, assiduous prayers, profound humility and great confidence in the Blood of Jesus Christ. Have no doubt at all about the fulfillment of your desires for the Archconfraternity, for in due time they will be fully answered" (Letter 3786).

Albertini left Rome on the morning of Wednesday, November 4, accompanied by Don Gaspar, Don Raffaele Brandimarte, Don Angelo Primavera and Don Giuseppe Visconti. They made their first stop in Velletri, because they were expected by Cardinal Mattei. On the evening of the following day Gaspar held an evening oratory for the city, and Albertini was pleased. He wrote to Gaspar's sister-in-law Paolina in Roma: "Thursday evening a public oratory was held in Velletri with the Cardinal Bishop attending and my firstborn Son doing the preaching. This filled me with consolation, especially when one saw how deserted the city was during the oratory. Blessed be the Blood of Jesus Christ forever."

The next day they continued their journey. On the outskirts of Sermoneta, the missionaries went into the town while the bishop continued on. He reached Terracina on the afternoon of November 5 and there received a triumphant reception. The stop in Sermoneta was motivated by the need to wait for the day

and hour agreed on for the solemn entrance of the missionaries into Terracina on November 8.

While waiting there, the group preached a triduum in the form of a mission, which was very moving for the people.

Meanwhile the bishop set aside time to familiarize himself with the situation of the citizens of Terracina. They were busy and exciting days. In a quiet moment, he sent off a letter to Paolina, but had to end it with these words: "I do not write more because they are telling me that the antechambers are full of people who want an audience. I bless you millions of times and am your true Father in Jesus Christ."

Sunday, November 7, marked the celebration of the patron saint of the city, Saint Cesarius. Monsignor Albertini held a solemn pontifical Mass in the cathedral. "It was a great success. The throng of people seemed to be without end and they came from all parts of the diocese."

Here is Albertini's account of the beginning of the missions in a letter to Paolina: "On Monday we marked the entrance of the Holy Mission. At the 21st hour, I left the palace dressed in a cassock along with the entire Chapter and the Clergy similarly dressed, along with all the societies of that City, and we were followed by a great throng of people to the Gate of the city. When we arrived there, I met my dearest Firstborn with his entire Group, and I received them and led them into the Cathedral where, having said some brief prayers, I gave Him a very short introduction, during which I began to see the stirring of the people who were standing by the confessionals and in the corners of the church. I assisted from the throne and the consolation that I felt is inexpressible."

During the following days the mission followed its usual schedule. Some of the missionaries went to San Felice Circeo. Locatelli was a part of this group.

Albertini wrote: "The Missions took their course in a remarkable way and they are achieving great good. Prayers, therefore, prayers, so that God may continue his blessings. My Firstborn is in excellent health, even better than when he is in Rome. I stand in wonder at the grace of God, and all the companions are doing very well." He continued enthusiastically: "Oh, if you would find yourself here, certainly you would not be able to bear the consolation. How much good is being done because of the mercy of God. Oh how much! I do not know how to explain to you the throng of people, the compunction and the frequency of the sacraments which one observes. One can truly say that this town is made holy. Last Wednesday the procession of penance was held, and yesterday, the procession of the Dead Christ, in which all the societies participated along with the clergy and myself. Oh, one would need a heart of stone to refrain from weeping. We were walking in the midst of tears. May the Most Precious Blood be blessed forever."

But it was as if a lighthearted festival was underway while in the distance there was the rumble of thunder. On November 10, there were some cases of a suspicious illness and some deaths. Someone began to murmur the terrible word: "Malaria!" But it seemed incredible given the season. Malaria in November?

The panic began to grow as more people became sick and some died. There were only two doctors in the city to fight the disease, one old and the other in poor health. The situation appeared to be intolerable and there was much discontent. The circumstances worked in favor of the mission, because public calamities were considered punishments from God and it was thought that demonstrations of faith would serve to placate the supposed divine anger

In Albertini's correspondence there is no mention of the disease, because he wanted to keep the two women and his

niece calm. He is thus not a reliable chronicler of the events. He exaggerated the assurances of his good health. Evidently the news of the epidemic reached Rome, and this served to put in perspective the fears of those two poor women whose subsistence was tied to the lives of their priest relatives.

The days passed with great intensity. Don Gaspar learned about the initiatives begun in Terracina. Albertini was filled with joy. Everything was going according to the established plans, except for a steady stream of deaths.

"My true and most beloved Daughter," the bishop wrote to Paolina, "God continues to rain down, or rather unleash a deluge of his heavenly blessings on the Holy Missions, and because of this, they are reporting incalculable results. Oh, if you could have been in this church on Sunday! There never was such a touching spectacle! It was the sermon on hell, and to arouse the great number of people from their stunned silence, the image of Mary was carried in triumph. The weeping, the clamor, the outcry that came together at that moment: who could ever describe it?"

What gave Albertini the greater consolation was recognizing that all of the theatricality was producing authentic emotions. The confessionals were thronged. "It's enough for you to know," he wrote, "that they were happy to stand all night waiting in the church to be able to confess in the morning."

"While I am writing, all the bells of the city are ringing as a sign that those who were in conflict with one another are all reconciled. On the streets one hears nothing but people who are praying the rosary or singing litanies."

The letter was dated November 17. The mission in Terracina was coming to an end and the missionaries were exhausted, but each day the number of the dead was increasing. Albertini, not in perfect health despite his statements to the contrary, was present at all the processions, catechism classes, and

sermons. He went from the historic center to the Marina, always full of fervor. He used the discipline several times and blessed the memorial cross.

On the evening of November 9 the closing ceremony took place. Many of the organizations of San Felice Circeo had come with their banners. The same evening, the chests with materials necessary for preaching left for Priverno, where the following day they were to begin the next mission. Terracina fell prey to panic. The great religious fervor seemed surreal, like a festival that was taking place under the fury of rain, amid bolts of lightning and explosions of thunder.

The day before, the commandant of the papal carabinieri, Domenico Sersali, had decided to give official notice to the apostolic delegate in Frosinone. He had written to him: "An edematous marsh fever (*una febbre edemica paludare*) threatens all the inhabitants of this unhappy city, both natives and foreigners. Three died of it last night, and many are going to die from it, and generally we are all sick. People are grumbling against the Government. They are saying that people are perishing because adequate provisions were not made, leaving the city without even a physician (*un fisico professore*). Doctor Castellini is gravely ill and Doctor Pedocchi, in his advanced years, is of little use to us... Doctor Zecca di Lenola[was called] to Terracina from the Kingdom [of Naples]. This worthy man, even though he was not paid, helps any suffering person who calls him, but since he has obligations in his own Municipality, he cannot continue to remain in Terracina and render the assistance he would like to."

The devil had shaken his tail there. The unforeseen event was threatening to thwart the growth of the good seed planted in that soil by the missionaries. All the same, Albertini, on November 20, could write to Rome: "See how gloriously the mission of Terracina has concluded, in which so much good has been done

that the tongue could not explain."

The following mission, in Priverno, appeared to be more of a challenge. Sonnino lay in its territory. The demolition of the houses had been suspended, but the order for their destruction had not been revoked. Many hopes were placed on the success of the preaching. A great conversion would occur, as in Nineveh. Albertini certainly hoped so.

Chapter 26
DEATH COMES LIKE A THIEF

On the morning of November 20, the people of San Felice Circeo who had spent the night in Terracina wanted to receive the bishop's blessing before heading back to their town. Albertini agreed and, clearly happy, immediately went to the chapel to celebrate Mass. He had just written a letter to Paolina in which he told her: "My Firstborn left for Priverno this morning with his group. I believed that I could follow, but since I am ill that special vicar, in whose house I must reside because the bishop's residence is still not ready, wanted to keep me here in Terracina for some days, and I will go to Priverno after the mission has begun." In reality Don Gaspar was still in Terracina and was preparing to leave.

Monsignor Albertini wanted all the clergy of the diocese to participate in a retreat in Terracina. He had sent out the invitations, stressing the need for conversion. He knew how prickly it would be to deal with the representatives of Christ. His illness spared him the pain of reading a letter from Don Mattia Saputo, who, in the name of the entire chapter of Roccagorga, was notifying him that they refused to participate in the retreat. The rather rough priest began with irony: "There is no doubt that such an order [to go to Priverno] is directed at reforming our wicked customs..." He was not aware that with that letter he was offering convincing proof of the need for reforming the clergy.

Don Mattia justified the serious decision not to participate: "there never being the style, use and custom that the entire body of the Chapter and the clergy would abandon their place of residence to go somewhere else to make the Holy Exercises, abandoning the people with only a single priest confessor." It is likely that Don Mattia cared little for the people of Roccagorga, and that the confessionals there were never that crowded.

Poor Albertini, who had concealed the strange malaise that he had felt spreading through his body, had a sudden attack of fever toward the end of Mass. He wanted to greet the last citizens of San Felice who were leaving for home. At that moment, the porters who had transferred the materials to Priverno arrived and said that in that city about half the population was in bed. Albertini decided to suspend the program and send the Missionaries back to Rome. He was not steady on his feet, and he staggered back to his room.

Don Giuseppe Visconti went to him and found him in bed. He said to him: "Monsignor, I have learned from the director of the missions [Gaspar] that he must return to Rome..."

"Eh," responded the sick Albertini, "you must think about your father and mother. What would you do if you get the fever? As for me, justice obliges me to stay here. *Bonus pastor dat animam suam pro ovibus suis* 'the good shepherd gives his life for his sheep'."

"Monsignor," replied Visconti, "I will do what you wish, but I have some work for the greater glory of God to do here!" He added, "I wish to remain here."

"Those are convincing reasons," Albertini admitted, "I am glad that you are staying, because you will be a comfort to me. However, take some precautions because an old man told me that quinine reduces the fever, but also has negative effects."

The doctor had described the bishop's fever as of a "rheumatic-bilious" nature that he regarded as not dangerous, "all the more so because the sick person was aided by nature thanks to continuous sweating." With such reassurances, Don Gaspar and his missionaries left Terracina on November 22, displeased but at peace. When he went to greet his beloved spiritual father, the latter wanted to write a letter to Paolina. He had not lost his sense of humor. Don Francesco wrote her: "See how suddenly I send you

my Firstborn, safe and sound. Because there are many sick persons in Priverno and Sezze, I decided it would be better to put off the missions in those places until a more suitable time. He will stop at the Hospice, where he will send you my letter, and you are to prepare a good dinner for him at once. Be at peace and continue on as usual."

A certain Doctor Pacifico Sebastianelli headed a study commission, and in a case history he stated his opinion that the illnesses he observed in Terracina and Priverno were not malaria, but some sort of intermittent fevers. He was concerned about possible serious side effects of quinine and delayed prescribing its use. In retrospect, of course, quinine might have been effective since the illnesses were indeed malaria.

Sebastianelli recommended some hygienic precautions, including a more careful burial of the dead. It was impossible to enter the church of the Annunziata without becoming nauseated. The normal atmosphere in the churches was a cadaverous stench that even abundant flowers could not dispel. Water also had to be controlled more rigorously.

Albertini was absolutely convinced that the unaccustomed epidemic was the work of the conquered devil. If things stood this way, the devil had to be angry above all with Gaspar, who had departed for Rome after his triumphant mission. Moved with a fatherly spirit, Albertini would pray: "I am the pastor of these souls. Do not permit, O my God, that the devil strike that son of mine, but rather me who am ready to give my life for my dear sheep."

He now felt that he was in a condition in which he could pray the *Nunc dimittis*.[1] The Missionaries were solidly under the guidance of Gaspar, and the Maestre were awaiting the arrival of

[1] The *Nunc dimmitis* is a prayer that is simply a quotation from Lk 2: 29-32. It reads, in part: "Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, according to your word..."

Caterina Bentivoglio Orsi. What yet had he to do on this earth? He had always lived intent on deferring to others and was now ready to step aside forever. The tree had taken root in Rome and the two branches were ready to expand into the world. The prophecy of Maria Agnese del Verbo Incarnato was fulfilled. The *filotapinosi,* the love of humble things, now reached its highest peak: death.

Albertini had asked that his room be locked from outside. Was this a presentiment of impending death? If the room had been locked from inside and Don Francesco died, the door would have to be knocked down. Meanwhile, his doctors were offering him false hope by minimizing the gravity of his symptoms, but the bishop now and then would say: "Death is inevitable."

He asked for the sacraments. The doctors, either to encourage him or for fear of depressing the sick man, insisted on denying the need for the sacraments. Albertini, while submitting to their opinion, insisted: "One has to die sometime."

At night Don Visconti heard a great commotion in the bishop's room: rumbling and blows. He asked Locatelli if he knew something, and Locatelli, the next day, asked for an explanation from Albertini. The latter, with the air of one who must confide a great secret, said to Don Luigi to go to the door of the room and to place the bed against it. When the secretary returned to his side Albertini told him: "Listen, my son, it is hardly something new in the history of the Church that the servants of the Lord, after having done good work, receive persecutions and blows from the infernal enemy..."

Locatelli did not understand. He could not believe that the bishop would call himself "a servant of the Lord," and that he believed that he had "done good work" and would boast about it. It was so out of character for one who had sought to live a radically humble life. The bishop became even more mysterious. He enjoined him to keep secret about what he was about to say

and continued with a faint voice: "Tonight I was struck vigorously by the demon in such a way that I ache and am bruised all over. I cried out, but apparently no one heard me."

Locatelli's amazement now turned into discomfort. Was the bishop singing his own praises in a delirium of self-congratulation? Regaining his breath, the bishop clarified his secret: "All these blows were directed to my firstborn. I prayed that they fall on me and the Lord heard me..." Thus, Albertini was referring to *Gaspar* as the "servant of the Lord" who had "done good work."

That evening, the doctor who was attending him prescribed quinine. Another doctor arrived unexpectedly a little later, and he disapproved of administering the medication and "sent for other more potent medicines." Albertini, a spectator at this dispute between two experts, was somewhat amused by the differing opinions of the doctors and commented: "The doctors are arguing about my illness. Meanwhile, I am dying in their presence."

Sometime later, he turned to the doctor who stood beside him: "You have not believed it necessary to request the Viaticum for me. I have already confessed and know that it is time to receive it."

The doctor argued that he was wrong. Albertini remained conscious and cheerful. He carried on a conversation with those present. Again he asked for Viaticum. "It is the moment to receive the Lord. We must be with him, especially at the last hour. When I am dead, bury me in the chapel of the Blessed Sacrament."

He had Locatelli give him a report on the course of the mission in San Felice. He was enthusiastic when he heard how successful it had been. He could not get enough of speaking of the devotion to the Most Precious Blood: "It is a powerful weapon!" he would say. The bishop repeated ejaculations continually. He

compared the sufferings of Jesus and of the Madonna with his own and concluded that he really would be wrong to complain. These discourses would be interrupted with prayers to his saints: Francis Xavier, Francis of Paola, Aloysius Gonzaga, Francis de Sales and others.

On the afternoon of November 23 he became pensive, quiet and tense. They asked him why he had abandoned his natural joyfulness. He replied: "How can you expect me to be happy when I am feeling ill? That's what I am feeling!" A little later he began to smile serenely once more.

As night fell, he told those present that he did not like keeping them there. He wanted them to go to sleep and recommended himself to their prayers. Only the devoted Locatelli remained in the room with him. The sick man was grateful to him, and on more than one occasion he would stroke Locatelli's hand and would say, with great emotion: "Aloysius! Aloysius!"

The night did not pass quietly. The sick man paced about his room and threw himself on the bed, seeking some sort of comfort. But he never uttered a complaint. He was flushed with thirst and would often say: "Aloysius, *sitio* 'I thirst'."

The entreaty "*sitio!*" showed that Albertini was facing his dying in communion with Christ on the cross.

The morning of November 24 they asked him how he felt. His appearance did not bode well for a good outcome. "The sickness will take its course," the bishop replied.

The doctor took his pulse. He was of the opinion that the illness was reaching the so-called pernicious stage. It was the moment to receive the Viaticum. He said to the bishop: "Monsignor, the time is right today for you to receive the Viaticum you asked for yesterday. I am caring for your body; here next to me is Canon Visconti, who will care for your soul."

"Now you are talking like a Christian," said the bishop.

"I was speaking as a Christian yesterday as well," replied the doctor, "but I said what I did because I did not see the necessity."

"But I said this to thank you for the good news," replied the patient, as if fearing that he had offended the doctor.

He asked when they would bring Viaticum. Meanwhile, all the clergy present in the bishop's residence had gathered in the room. Canon Visconti was already prepared to place the host on the tongue, when the bishop, "with a holy expression, majestic and sustained, turned to his clergy" and said: "I ask pardon for whatever scandal I have managed to give. I leave you and recommend to you the devotion to the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ and urge peace and harmony among all of you. [Death] is a step that everyone must take and now it is my turn. I hope one day to see you all again in the heavenly fatherland."

After receiving Communion, he wanted the Anointing of the Sick to be administered. He followed the prayers "with a lively faith and heavenly joy." He listened with a joyful cheerfulness and repeated whatever expressions of resignation and comfort that the Visconti would suggest. From time to time the bishop expressed his gratitude.

The scene, dramatic in itself, became almost comical. The bishop not only agreed with the beautiful words that the priest was addressing to him, but it was almost as if he were evaluating them, as would a professor examining a student: "Bravo, bravo. Very good. Excellent."

Bishop Albertini listened to the gospel narrative of the death of Jesus, and he was struggling for breath. He even came to the point of asking himself if he were not already dead. At times those around him thought he was dead, only to watch the poor man take another labored breath.

"Today you will be with me in paradise!" When Albertini heard those words of Jesus to the good thief, he fixed his eyes on

heaven and extended his right arm in a gesture of blessing to those present. It was his final gesture; he was dead.

The similarity to the good thief lay only in the "today" of the passage. Everyone understood it in that sense. At that precise instant, Bishop Albertini experienced a release from time to live the *today* without end of eternity. He had nothing in common with the penitent thief. He had never stolen anything from anyone, but he had poured out his life to the very last drop.

Chapter 27
THE MEMORY OF THE JUST[1]

As soon as the news of the bishop's death spread through the city, the residence was thronged by the people, who pushed at the gate so that they could see their pastor once more. The body, now prepared as well as possible, was presented to receive the homage of the faithful, who kissed his feet as they filed by. They were stopped from any improper acts of devotion, such as removing relics. Some rubbed their rosaries and handkerchiefs on the body.

Meanwhile the sad news was on its way to Rome, to Gaspar.

Twenty-four hours after the death, the doctors met to make the official declaration of death required by law and to proceed with the embalming.

Those present were astonished with what they observed. It was impossible to move the right arm to the customary position on the breast. It remained as it was at the moment of death, in a gesture of blessing. When the arm was forced into the desired position it straightened again, repeating the gesture of blessing. Some present argued that it meant that he had wanted to bless the people of Sezze and Priverno as well. But the position did not change even after the third attempt, and they had to accept that it would stay that way even in the casket. From this they inferred that the bishop was expressing his wish to be always an intercessor for the diocese that had been his for such a short time.

They observed that the toenails had not been trimmed in years and that they had become embedded in the flesh. The doctors present could not refrain from exclaiming: "How could this man walk? Who knows the pain he felt with every step?"

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[1] Cf. Prv 10:7: "The memory of the just will be blessed."

On his back were found bruises that had to have come from some kind of blows. The opinion of the doctors was that, in addition to the torment caused by his feet, he had also taken the discipline. Only Locatelli knew that those bruises came from the devil.

The doctor who was supposed to take care of the embalming confessed that he felt it would be repugnant to do so. He said quite candidly that it did not seem right to violate the integrity of that body that had been treated by its owner with superhuman restraint. The priests present found his observations convincing. The body was clothed in pontifical vestments, placed in the coffin and carried in procession into the cathedral for the solemn funeral rites, which took place on November 26, 1819.

Don Gaspar learned of Albertini's death when he arrived in Rome. It was a brutal blow. Writing of this to Don Biagio Valentini, he said: "*Sacrificia Medullata offeram tibi* 'I will offer you sacrifices of fatlings' [cf. Psalm 65: 15]...Let us carry on all the same, even if we have lost our common father, but let us be even more courageous, trusting that he is aiding us with his prayers from Heaven" (Letter 235).

EPILOGUE

Albertini's death had unfortunate economic consequences. The holy bishop did not have adequate funds for the celebrations marking his inauguration as bishop, the expenses of the mission and other expenses and had to resort to borrowing against anticipated revenues. The sudden end of his episcopacy posed the problem of recovering that money. To protect himself, the archpriest Sanguigni, who was the diocesan tax agent, had seals placed on Albertini's room.

The value of the property there amounted to about 500 scudi. Most of the objects of value were those usually appropriated by the chapter: the pectoral cross, miters and vestments. This explains the caution of the archpriest. To repay what had been borrowed, a claim was made against the property of the family of the deceased. That property belonged to the nieces of the bishop, or rather, to the monastery that had accepted the two young women along with the dowry promised by the bishop. The pope, familiar with the case, appointed Muccioli as the executor of the estate, in agreement with Cristaldi.

Meanwhile, Albertini's tomb immediately became the object of popular devotion, even if there was an effort made to discourage such a cult. The flowers piled up on the slab of the tomb; candles burned there every hour of the day and night. Rumors of miracles began to circulate.

On February 9, 1820, Don Luigi Locatelli wrote to Muccioli, who had requested some information from him: "With regard to the sick man cured by the grace obtained by our angelic deceased Bishop Albertini, I have nothing positive, but I do know for certain that an unknown person came to me in a state of holy excitement to request a relic of the Monsignor. I gave him a small piece of

black cloth and I have not seen him again. I have heard that he received the grace, but I do not know what it was. It is certain, on the other hand, that so many people have come requesting relics that I was forced to write to our brother del Bufalo, who has promised to send me some by way of Father Giampedi. I have given a piece of black cloth to about two hundred persons. At his holy tomb there is a great crowd of people, especially in these days of the Carnival."

As a sign of mourning, no one prepared for the carnival that year. Locatelli added: "I hope in the Precious Blood of Jesus that it will not take place this year, out of love and gratitude for the great Albertini, *cujus memoria in benedictione erit* 'whose memory will be a blessing'... If I would see with my own eyes the great miracles performed by our father I would not be surprised; I know that he was a saint and died a saint."

Then, listing the works that had been started in Terracina, he judged that they were going well and on the way to being fully successful. For him, they were all Albertini's miracles. And if the bishop had rejoiced on earth on account of those initiatives, Locatelli noted, "We can imagine the great joy he is experiencing now in paradise."

The College was full of exemplary young men, all inscribed in the Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood. Every day they would recite the Chaplet of the Precious Blood. They seemed to be "so many New Jesuits." Perhaps they were in spirit, but their garb made it difficult to think of them as followers of Loyola or of the love of humble things, *filotapinosi*. They were dressed "in purple tweed, with red cuffs, a red sash and red tassels in the manner of cardinals." Even so pompously dressed, they walked with dignity, in the judgment of Locatelli, and with exemplary modesty. Albertini wanted the red sash in memory of the Blood of Jesus and certainly not to make the young men look like cardinals.

"And isn't the monastery not another miracle?" was Don Luigi's rhetorical question. "Some days ago, the first block of stone for the new wing was laid. I placed a piece of the cassock of our Glorious Father there, in the form of a cross. I am seeing the effects. May the Lord who favors us so be ever blessed."

Don Locatelli did not neglect a remark for Cristaldi, "the Most Holy Auditor, who," he said, "is very busy promoting the beautiful plans of our Father [Albertini]." Finally, he promised to have a conversation as soon as possible with Monsignor Falzacappa, the new spiritual director of the Countess Bentivoglio, to whom was entrusted the task of founding the feminine institute of the Archconfraternity.

The monastery was to be the mother house of the institute that the deceased bishop had wanted. His "firstborn daughter," Caterina Bentivoglio Orsi, was to have gone there. The occasion for this could have been the death of Priori, who died not long after Albertini. Locatelli intended to replace her with the head of the sodality of the Sisters of Charity, a married woman. Gaspar was quick to suggest a very pious widow, ready to dedicate herself to the institute, who was about to arrive in Rome. We do not know if he meant Bentivoglio, whose candidacy he certainly endorsed. Locatelli must not have been enthusiastic, and then an opportunity at Frosinone opened up for the countess.

Unfortunately, the hopes of Locatelli were partly dashed by a terrible occurrence. The beloved college was occupied by bandits. One of the professors and two of the young men were murdered. The new bishop, Monsignor Carlo Manasse, whom Gaspar and Cristaldi wanted to continue carrying out the work that had hardly begun, abandoned the field out of desperation and took refuge in his native Comacchio.

The "love of humble things" seemed to be affirmed beyond the death of Albertini, even to the point of the obliteration of his

memory. During the brief episcopate of Manasse, who returned to his flock due to pressure from Gaspar, a few things were accomplished. The feminine institute was given the name of the Daughters of the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ. A mission house was opened and the remains of the late bishop received a more dignified disposition, even if provisory.

The inscription reads:

H(eic) S(itus) E(st)
Franciscus Albertinus
Domo Roma
Can(onicus) aed(ium) Nicol(ai) ad Carc(erem) Tullian(um)
rebus Curion(um) componendis
Et Clericis Proband(is) in Urbe Praep(ositus)
Conditor Sodalitatis
Cui a Christi Sanguine nomen est
Tenax propositi Relgi(ionis) Ergo
In Corsica ins(ula) Captiuvs exulavit
Inde redux
Ad Episcopat(us) Terracinen(sium) Setinor(um
Privern(ensium)
A Pio VII Pontifice Maximo evectus est
Vixit annos XXXXVIIII sanctissime
Decessit in pace VIII K(alendas) Dec(embris) anno
MDCCCXVIIII

[English translation:]
Here lies Francisco Albertini whose home was Rome. He was Canon of the Church of Saint Nicholas in the Tullian Prison[1] and Dean of the City [of Rome], charged with gathering the deans and examining clerics. He was the Founder of the Sodality whose title

[1] This is the full title of the church of San Nicola in Carcere. The "carcere" or prison in the title refers to the ruins of a prison upon which the church was constructed.

is the Blood of Christ. He was steadfast in [holding to] the object of religion. Therefore he was exiled as a captive to the island of Corsica. When he returned he was elevated to the episcopacy of Terracina, Sezze and Priverno by Pius VII, Supreme Pontiff. He lived a most holy life for forty-eight years and died in peace eight days before the kalends of December[2] in the year 1819.

At the death of Bishop Manasse, however, pastors with a different orientation were sent to the episcopal see, and everything disappeared. The mission house that had been opened in Priverno was closed. The sepulcher of the "most saintly bishop" gradually fell into oblivion and what had been a temporary monument ended up being forgotten.

Everything would have come to an end if Albertini's projects had not been taken on, as if by a vow, by his spiritual son. Gaspar del Bufalo, with the greatest filial love and admiration, set about gathering the fragments of the thoughts of the holy bishop and invited everyone who knew him to do the same. Every episode was saved from oblivion. It was not always easy, given that Albertini had spent his life deliberately placing himself in the background.

It was not only a question of gathering the ideas that he had actually expressed, but also of recalling the practice that he followed in the early days. Don Gaspar was committed to do this for many reasons, and he threw himself unreservedly into the task. He would say: "I do not fail to carry out most faithfully the principles of Monsignor Albertini" (Letter 642). In another letter

[2] Latin inscriptions of the era often used the ancient Roman calendar. Days of the month were indicated by the number of days preceding three significant days of the month: the kalends (or calends), the nones and the ides. The kalends fell on the first of the month, so 8 days before the kalends would be November 24.

he remarks that "...our most beloved founder [Albertini]...still seems to be speaking with me, and I obey him as if he were still living" (Letter 913).

Since Gaspar carried out Albertini's plans without changing the smallest detail, he would go on to merit the title of founder of the Missionaries, just as his spiritual father had always wanted. Albertini wanted Gaspar to become his spiritual son and a father to many followers who would be sons of an obvious father, Gaspar, and of a secret father, Albertini.

Albertini is recognized as the hidden spiritual father not only of the Missionaries, of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ and of their lay associates, but of other families dedicated to the Most Precious Blood who derived their spirit from the Archconfraternity.[3]

[3] For example, the Daughters of Charity of the Most Precious Blood, founded by Tommaso Fusco, and the Sisters of the Precious Blood of Maria Anna and Francis de Sales Brunner.

NOTES

(The following is a summary of the author's notes found at the end of the volume.)

The Hidden Father is the third in a series of four books by Don Michele Colagiovanni on the lives of the Venerable John Merlini, Biagio Valentini, Francesco Albertini and Saint Gaspar del Bufalo, published between 1995 and 1999 by the Italian Province of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood. Valentini became Gaspar's spiritual director after the death of Bishop Albertini and succeeded Gaspar as the moderator general of the Congregation. Merlini was also close to Gaspar and was secretary general under Valentini, succeeding him as moderator general.

The principal archives consulted were: the General Archives of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood, the *Tabularium Vicariatus Urbis* 'Archives of the Urban Vicariate' (i.e., of the Diocese of Rome) for both the background of the Parish of San Nicola in Carcere and for the Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood; the Episcopal Archive of Terracina; the *Parish Archive of Saint Gothard* in Intragna, Switzerland, Canton Ticino; the *Archive of the Tarquinian Society of Art and History*, of Tarquinia, for the background on Falzacappa. That information was furnished by Don Beniamino Conti, C.PP.S.