



Congregation of the Daughters
of St. Mary of Providence

Sr. Elda Soscia, DSMP

The Daughters of St. Mary of Providence

(1871-1899)

7

FORMATION BOOKLETS

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THE DAUGHTERS OF ST. MARY OF PROVIDENCE (1871-1899)

Introduction

The title of this presentation should lead us to begin our history of the facts starting with Pianello. But before we embark directly on this subject, we could ask ourselves: *when did Fr. Guanella first conceive of giving life to a female congregation?*

If we consider the experience of Traona, immediately before Pianello, we see that Fr. Guanella was essentially involved in the male area, while he attempted to gather round his mission those first “collaborators” who had left Don Bosco to follow him.

To answer our question even briefly, it is necessary to take a look at the development of Fr. Guanella’s vocation: when did Fr. Guanella realize not only that he had the vocation to become a priest, but that he was called to be a *founder* and, in our case, the founder of a *congregation for women*?

We find a first answer in his *Memorie* (Memoirs):

“The Lord disposed that Guanella, the seminarian, in the third and fourth years of his theological studies ... should meet Don Bosco, now a Servant of God, and Cottolengo, whose institutions he admired and loved the more he had the opportunity to study them. Thus we

can conclude that this was the beginning of Guanella's vocation".¹

On January 29, 1875 Fr. Guanella arrived at Don Bosco's just as the Superiors were coming out of a meeting at which it had been decided to found missions in America. Don Bosco said to him at the door of the hall, "So we are going America?". "I would like to go too", answered Fr. Guanella, "to establish a family of *daughters* in the diocese, and another perhaps, of *sons*".² So the thought of giving life to a female congregation was also present in the period he spent with Don Bosco.

Fr. Cugnasca relates that in Pianello:

Father Aloysius "felt called to do something different, not merely to care for souls, and in a wider field. Having several times accompanied young postulants to Turin had inspired in him the desire to be able to do something in his own diocese on the lines of what Cottolengo and Don Bosco had done".³

Did he really have a female congregation in mind? Certainly his mention of those "seven postulants"⁴ accompanied from various countries to Don Bosco's might suggest that he was giving particular "consideration" to female religious life. When after the failure of Traona he wrote to his friend Fr. Silvestri

¹ L. GUANELLA, *Le vie della Provvidenza, Memorie autobiografiche*, Rome, Nuove Frontiere, 1988, p. 13.

² L. GUANELLA, *Pensieri intorno a don Bosco*, manuscript, 1891, n. 4 ASC 123/Guanella. Cf. the publication by M. CARROZZINO, *Don Guanella e don Bosco. Storia di un incontro e di un confronto*, Rome, Nuove Frontiere, 1989, pp. 275-284.

³ M. CUGNASCA, *Don Guanella «uomo straordinario nelle opere e nelle virtù»*, Rome, Nuove Frontiere, 1989, p. 32.

⁴ L. GUANELLA, *Le vie della Provvidenza...*, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

defending his activities and declaring his resolution to continue and to work without respite, he also said:

“As for the couple of nuns you said were happy in Traona, I congratulate myself within the bounds of propriety. I am of the opinion that piety should be fostered in the weaker sex, especially when little or nothing can be done with the other”.⁵

He also speaks to the Bishop with conviction of his particular capacity in the context of the world of women: “Likewise I have perhaps obtained the best results until now in the care of the devout sex and the more wretched ones”.⁶

Thus over and above his priestly ministry, Guanella had the awareness of a “specific mission”, as well as a certain consciousness of having a more obvious “gift” with regard to the female sex. Nevertheless, what prevails is the sign of his “calling” in the broad sense. He was attentive to this calling throughout his life, convinced that it came “from above”, and that therefore no obstacle would deter him from following what he felt to be God’s will for him. The meaning of this call was so deeply rooted within him that even at the end of his life he was to declare he had acted essentially with this in mind. Concerning his forthcoming journey to America, he was to say on December 5, 1912:

“First of all there is the call ... then other human reasons, such as spreading the good that is done, taking

⁵ Letter from L. Guanella to Fr. N. Silvestri, March 5, 1885, AG, Como.

⁶ Letter from L. Guanella to Bishop P. Carsana, March 19, 1885, AG, Como.

opportunities as they arise and trying out alternative residences, in case of persecution”.⁷

He was to say the same on this topic on May 26, 1915, almost as if he wanted to sing his own *Magnificat* for the 49 years of priesthood he was celebrating:

“I already had the foundations in my mind and heart as a seminarian.... I introduced about forty vocations to the Sisters of Our Lady, Help of Christians.... I also thought of priestly vocations, but I was not as successful. In Pianello, the effective work was begun. First came the female congregation, more numerous and successful: about 600: many flowers of virtue.... Then the male congregation...”⁸

Wishing to conclude with regard to our first question, we can answer that Providence permitted Fr Guanella to give birth to the female congregation first precisely because of his greater aptitude for the spiritual care of the female world. However Guanella’s initial project was not limited to either the male or the female context. The Father’s Providence forged the way, and whoever, like Guanella, always felt himself “a humble instrument in the hands of Providence”, only collaborated. This is the opinion of Msgr. Bacciarini who expresses himself as follows:

“I have the deepest conviction which I have formed since I first came close to the Servant of God, that he has always constantly striven to found two separate, independent congregations: one of sisters, for female works of charity;

⁷ L.. MAZZUCCHI, *Fragmenta vitae et dictorum Sac. Aloysii Guanella 1912-1915*, manuscript, p. 10, AG, Como.

⁸ L. MAZZUCCHI, *Fragmenta vitae et dictorum...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-39.

and one of priests, for male works of charity. His intention, forcefully pronounced and reasserted so many times, was to leave an enduring work of charity and salvation behind him”.⁹

Fr. Leonardo Mazzucchi, on the other hand, seems to say that Fr. Guanella’s main idea was to found a male congregation. He wrote:

“The Servant of God had had the foundation of a male congregation at the back of his mind since his youth, and he himself associated this idea with his constant desire to encourage ecclesiastical vocations among the people. His idea crystallized in Turin in 1875 and in addition to this intention, he also began to be concerned, almost by a twist of Providence, with the female congregation”.¹⁰

If on the one hand what has been said so far gives no specific preference to the cause of either the male or female congregation, on the other, and this is important for us, it explains that in the single Guanellian project, the period of gestation that was to lead to the birth and gradual formation of the congregations is common to both. Therefore, although we will essentially call upon female voices, what will now be said with regard first to Pianello and then to Como, refers to the foundation of both congregations, and must be a common field of study and reflection in the desire to give the Guanellian family true fidelity to the Founder’s initial plan.

We now address our specific subject, the developments which led the first women religious of Pianello

⁹ Witness of Msgr. A. Bacciarini, *AG Intr. Causae*, Vol. I, Rome 1937, p. 166.

¹⁰ Witness of, Fr. L. Mazzuchi, *ibid.*, p. 161.

to become Daughters of St. Mary of Providence; we will divide it into two phases:

1. the preparation: 1871-1884;
2. the beginnings and the way it gradually took shape: 1855-1899.

1. Preparation

1.1 *Coppini: the “founder”?*

“Anyone who wants to know the future must study the past, of both persons and things”.¹¹ This is what Fr. Guanella said to those closest to him, revealing his secret wish that his followers not tire of “commemorating” the past in order to build the future of the work in fidelity to it. He himself was very faithful to this principle and, as he developed and reinforced the growth and consistence of his foundations, he could constantly cast his gaze back to the past, to glean instructions from it for his progress.

When he founded the bulletin *La Provvidenza* in 1892, he published a story on the front page entitled *Le origini*. In it he explained to his benefactors and friends how the Little House had come into being, and immediately referred to the “excellent Fr. Carlo Coppini, parish priest in Pianello”.¹² And in another article in the same bulletin, he shed light on the action of Providence on behalf of the new institution. We read:

¹¹ L. GUANELLA, *Le vie della Provvidenza...*, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

¹² L. GUANELLA, *Origini della Piccola Casa della Divina Provvidenza*, in «La Provvidenza», December 1892, p. 1.

“Anyone who calmly examines the events that occurred after Coppini founded the Little House in Pianello Lario until today, could not help seeing in them the hand of divine Providence which sustains and watches over the charitable work”.¹³

Fr. Guanella not only described Coppini as “founder”, but wanted him to be recognized and venerated as such. In the 1894 rule, he even presents the relationship between himself and Coppini as that of director and founder.

“The Coppini hospice in Pianello Lario which after this founder’s death in 1882 providentially came into the hands of the priest Guanella, was extended to Como in 1886”.¹⁴

He frequently calls Coppini “founder” on a par with Sr. Marcellina, in texts such as this: “The superiors are an assistant general, in the living person of the co-foundress, Sr. Marcellina Bosatta, with the parish priest Coppini”.¹⁵

From what we are saying it appears obvious that Guanella felt Coppini’s work to be at the root of his own; even taking what has been said in this regard out of context, we are given to understand that in using the term “founder”, he gave it a lesser significance as though it were synonymous with “initiator”. He was to express himself later in these terms. In 1912 the bulletin of the

¹³ L. D’ANTUONO, *La Divina Provvidenza veglia sulla Piccola Casa*, in «La Provvidenza», March 1893, p. 29.

¹⁴ L. GUANELLA, *Norme principali per un regolamento interno della Piccola Casa 1894*, in *Scritti per le Congregazioni...*, edited and unedited works, Vol IV, edited by the Centro Studi Guanelliani, Rome, Nuove Frontiere, 1988, p. 111.

¹⁵ L. Guanella, *Statuto delle Vittime del Divino Amore*, in *Scritti per le Congregazioni...*, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

House of Divine Providence, in announcing the publication of the Fr. Leonardo Mazzucchi's book on Coppini, said:

“Our printing school in Como has recently published a biographical outline of Fr Carlo Coppini, parish priest of Pianello Lario and the initiator of our works for women”.¹⁶

In the subsequent issues of the bulletin the topic was mentioned several times and the tone tends increasingly to speak of the relationship as continuous, a legacy inherited and subsequently developed in the most unexpected way in Guanella's hands. It is Guanella's contribution that is considered to have been the most decisive and important for the destiny of the new work.

“A tiny seed had been planted in the ground with loving care by the late Fr Carlo Coppini. Fr Aloysius Guanella who succeeded him, took great pains to cultivate that seed and with Providence's help ... saw it marvelously burst into growth”.¹⁷

Thus at this point we can agree that Fr Guanella who often called Coppini “founder”, did so above all through a sense of respect and profound humility. He was loathe to sin by presuming to describe himself as “founder”, and for this reason prefers to give this title of “honor” to Coppini. It was to be his sons and daughters, his friends and everyone who benefited by his work who would call him “founder”, taking note of the development achieved by the humble seed sown by Coppini. In fact, in addition to the grace of knowing how to begin a work, being a

¹⁶ *Spigolando*, in «La Divina Provvidenza», February 1914, p. 19.

¹⁷ M. ALBINI-CROSTA, *Frontespizio Programma*, in «La Divina Provvidenza», February 1914, p. 19.

founder also involves the capacity to develop it, nurture its growth and bring it to maturity, according to an ideal that becomes a driving force which can overcome obstacles and focus his own energies and those of others on the goal fixed.

We could also ask ourselves a further question about “Coppini as founder”, in the sense of wishing to ascertain whether Coppini felt himself to be such. An analysis of the available documents brings us to exclude a positive reply to this query. In fact, the Pious Union of the Daughters of Mary which he established in Pianello was governed “by his justly approved Rule”¹⁸ and the parish priest Coppini is named as its “director”; his successors were to be such. The community of Camlago, for whom Coppini later wrote a Rule which, however, never received approval, is seen as deriving from the above-mentioned Pious Union. Sr. Marcellina with her witness seems to support this interpretation:

“In setting up the hospice, the parish priest Coppini intended to ensure above all that orphans were well cared-for and educated, and to offer a pious and safe place of refuge to those Daughters of Mary of Pianello who would remain unmarried until an advanced age”.¹⁹

Coppini’s intentions seem to be limited to the context of that series of projects undertaken by the parish priests of the time, seeking to foster the spiritual good of the people entrusted to their care. The zealous priest Fr Domenico Pestarino had achieved something similar for

¹⁸ Cf. *Decreto di erezione* of July 1, 1871, in *Registro della Pia Unione delle Figlie di Maria Immacolata*, manuscript, p. 2, AFSMP, Rome.

¹⁹ Witness of Sr. M. Bosatta, CB *Intr. Causae*, Rome 1926, p. 59.

example, at Mornese, in Monferrato. St. Maria Domenica Mazzarello belonged to the Pious Union of the Daughters of Mary, established by him, and later, with Don Bosco, founded the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.²⁰

With regard to Fr. Guanella, the parish priest Coppini seems somewhat similar to John the Baptist, the precursor, in his relationship with Jesus, the “founder” *par excellence*. Like John the Baptist, he made several allusions to his successor which help give us a precise idea of the proportions of the relationship we are studying.

Thus Sr. Marcellina recalls: “The parish priest, Fr. Coppini, in his last illness, confiding in me, said: “after me will come another who will do far more than I!”²¹

In taking on Coppini’s legacy, Guanella kept alive his gratitude to the man who through a gift of Providence had paved his way, and he grafted onto Coppini’s little plant the vigorous energy of the charism God had bestowed on him in order to found, develop and spread “a work of charity and salvation” for the advantage of the most “wretched ones”.

1.2 *Coppini’s activity: a Sunday school for girls*

With the help of the documents and testimonies of the time it is not difficult to reconstruct a rapid summary of Coppini’s actions and the sequence of events that determined the birth in Pianello, first of the Daughters of

²⁰ Cf. M.E. POSADA, *Giuseppe Frassinetti e Maria Domenica Mazzarello*, Rome, LAS, 1986, p. 54ff.

²¹ Witness of Sr. M. Bosatta, CB *Intr. Causae, op. cit.*, p. 64.

Mary Immaculate, and then of the Ursulines who with Fr Guanella gave birth to the Daughters of St. Mary of Providence. Here is a brief chronological outline:

- 1865: Fr. Coppini establishes a Sunday school for girls with the collaboration of Marcellina Bosatta.
- 1871: The Pious Union of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate is founded.
- 1872: Marcellina Bosatta and Maddalena Minatta, in accepting Coppini's guidelines, give life to a small hospice and begin to live *more religiosarum*.
- 1878: The profession of the first four women religious.
- 1880: Fr Coppini writes the first draft of the Rule for the hospice community.
- 1881: Fr. Carlo Coppini dies; Fr. Aloysius Guanella arrives at Pianello.

Having painted a general picture of the events, we will attempt to analyze some of them in greater detail, in order to understand what could have contributed to the gradual development of our charism.

Fr. Carlo Coppini was born in Domaso on Lake Como on 7 October 1827. He studied for the priesthood at Collegio Gallio and the theological seminary in Como and was ordained a priest on 5 June 1852. Spurred by the wave of enthusiasm which the events of 1848 aroused in the hearts of Italians and especially young people, he enrolled as a volunteer and even became Mazzini's personal secretary. But when he grew aware of the conspicuously anti-Catholic and anti-Christian spirit of this hero of Italian independence, he immediately left him to return to his seminary and his priestly ideal. He first exercised his ministry in Colico as curate, then in Montemezzo for four years, and finally served as parish priest in Pianello for 19 years. In all the places where he

demonstrated his priestly zeal he left the fame of his holiness of life and examples of courageous and enlightened zeal.²²

Coppini's main objective in Pianello was certainly to encourage his people's faith, religious practice and journey toward God. His most acute concern was for youth, convinced as he was that vital energies exist in the hearts of young people, capable of nourishing the purest ideals.

The fiery anticlericalism of the age made it all the harder for him to continue his work with young men which he had so zealously undertaken.²³ But Coppini did not give up and addressed his cares to young women, certain that in this way he would more easily be able to reach his goals. We read in his biography:

“In Pianello no one bothered with giving women regular instruction.... In practice, the whole female population was totally illiterate. In Coppini's work, the idea of remedying this deplorable ignorance was a wise way to succeed in his goal of sanctifying families by educating girls”.²⁴

At this point we come across the figure of Marcellina Bosatta. At that time the young girl was 18 years old and her heart was open to the most beautiful dreams.

“As from 1865 a nucleus of young women formed.... At their head was a pious young girl: Marcellina Bosatta. Having arranged her own little room in her parent's house,

²² For further information on Coppini, cf. L. MAZZUCCHI, *Il parroco Don Coppini*, Como, Scuola Tip. Casa Divina Provvidenza, 1911.

²³ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 71-74.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

every Sunday or holiday she invited her young followers there. This was emulated by other girls who had accompanied the first ones; Coppini directed and inspired everything”.²⁵

It should be noted here that Marcellina was not illiterate like the others. Alessandro Bosatti’s family was among the best in Pianello and he had been able to allow himself the luxury of providing for his girls’ instruction.

“When she was small, Marcellina had attended the school of her aunt, Maria Mazzucchi, and of a certain Maria Fusi di Musso, the two women in the village and neighborhood who were rather more conscious of the importance of reading and writing”.²⁶

We also know that she must subsequently have frequented the Canossian Sisters in Gravedona, with whom she was later to place young Dina²⁷, her sister.

Her involvement in the group of girls from the parish was to collaborate in the apostolic activity she had taken on rather than to exploit the benefits of this initiative for herself. Mazzucchi also implies this when he tells us of the girls’ gatherings in Marcellina’s home. Consequently she played an active part with the zealous parish priest and with him dedicated herself to improving the young girls of Pianello.

At this point it is lovely for everyone, but above all for us, the Daughters of St. Mary of Providence, to realize that it all began with Coppini’s decision, shared by Marcellina, to contribute to the advancement of women.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

²⁶ *In Memoria di Sr. Marcellina Bosatta*, Como-Lora, October 26, 1936, p. 12.

²⁷ Cf. Witness of Sr. M. Bosatta, CB, *Intr. Causae*, op. cit., p. 55.

By devoting our energies to tracing this, we will see a path being forged which is not foreign to our tradition.

1.3 *The Pious Union of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate*

In Coppini's activity we have seen the creation of that group of young girls who were in the habit of gathering in Marcellina's "little room" at first, and later in the parish prayer hall. The parish priest cared diligently for this group and found in it the inspiration to establish the "Pious Union of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate" (DMI) in Pianello.

The Decree of erection is dated July 1, 1871. The creation and development of this pious association is passed on to us by the *Registro della Pia Unione delle Figlie di Maria Immacolata*.²⁸ The first members of the Pious Union, in addition to Marcellina Bosatta were: Giuseppa Bonvini, Maddalena and Elisabetta Minatta and Teresa Dalera. We note that with the exception of the latter, the other four in the group subsequently all became Guanellian sisters. Indeed, when Fr. Guanella replaced Coppini, in the first period he continued to record the professions of his sisters in the registry of the Pious Union.²⁹

²⁸ Cf. note 18.

²⁹ We read on p. 18 of the *Registro* cited above: "On August 21, 1886, in the Little House of the Poor Servants in Como just before the conclusion of the Spiritual Exercises, on that same date and with the agreement of the Daughters of Mary and of St. Ursula and according to the official sacred rite, Maria Ombellina Calvi of Pianello was admitted to profession after having been dedicated to the Hospice for months with steadfast resolution. In faith, Guanella, Fr. Luigi".

Marcellina was to be superior of the DMI for many years, even when the Guanellian congregation had developed a life of its own; for long years Sr. Clare Bosatta and her sisters were to have the formation of the DMI as the realm of their privileged apostolate, and for many years all Guanellian novices were ascribed to the Pious Union of the DMI.³⁰

We have already mentioned that the Pious Union had its own Rule which had already been approved. A query made by the parish priest Fr. Michele Giudici, Fr. Guanella's successor, will make it clear to us that this *Rule* was the one "practiced in Genoa, and printed by Fr. Frassinetti".³¹

Giuseppe Frassinetti, (1804-1868), a zealous parish priest from Genoa, the author of numerous ascetic works and the brother of Bl. Paola Frassinetti, had promoted many sodalities, associations and pious unions among the Christian people whose purpose was to foster the holiness of the faithful, of each person in his own state of

³⁰ "After a year of apprenticeship novices are enrolled in the Pious Union of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate". L. GUANELLA, *Norme principali per un regolamento interno della Piccola Casa 1894*, in *Scritti per le Congregazioni...*, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

³¹ The query, which reveals to us what Rule was used in Pianello, was made on November 15, 1894 and was addressed by Giudici to the principal residence of the Pious Union of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate in Brescia, founded by the Girelli sisters and approved by Pius IX in 1866. Given that in his parish the Pious Union had followed Frassinetti's Rule since its constitution, and that it was only aggregated to the See of Brescia in 1878, Giudici asks whether in order to obtain the indulgences enjoyed by the latter, the Pianello group would have to abandon Frassinetti's Rule and adopt the Rule in use in Brescia. Cf. *Registro della Pia Unione...* *op. cit.*, p. 34, AFSMP Rome.

life without his or her being required to abandon the secular world. He founded the Pious Union of the Heart of Mary for boys from 7 to 14 years of age; the Pious Union for Christian widows; the Congregation of St. Leonard for ecclesiastics, etc. All these associations came into being in Genoa, at St. Sabina's Church where he was parish priest.³²

The origins of the Pious Union of the DMI which Coppini later extended to Pianello were somewhat different. It began in Mornese, in the Diocese of Acqui, Monferrato, through the work of the priest Fr. Domenica Pestarino, in about 1852. The *Rule* however, was written by Frassinetti in 1855. In 1859:

“Frassinetti came to hear of the life of St. Angela Merici and realized that the spirit and ways of the DMI group exactly corresponded to the Society dedicated to St. Ursula which Merici had created in the first half of the 16th century. Frassinetti later rewrote the DMI's Rule and published it again in 1863, with the title: *Regola della Pia Unione delle nuove Orsoline, Figlie di S. Maria Immacolata, sotto la protezione di S. Orsola e S. Angela Merici*”.³³

So this was the *Rule* followed by the group in Pianello. I summarize it briefly:

“The aim of the Pious Union is to form congregations of devout single women, with the purpose of procuring their own sanctification and assisting in the salvation of others”. Among the methods most recommended, the following precepts should be highlighted:

³² Cf. G. FRASSINETTI, *Opere Ascetiche*, Vol. II, Rome, Tip. Poliglotta Vaticana, 1909.

³³ M.E. POSADA, *Giuseppe Frassinetti...*, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

- the observance of the laws of God and the shunning of all sin, even venial sins;
- the practice of the evangelical counsels, formulated as follows: “the resolution of perfect chastity” and “the spirit of poverty and obedience”;
- an intense sacramental life; a sound life of piety, mystical practice and mortification;
- life in the world, but considering themselves “as dead to the world itself and living only for God”;
- involvement in works of mercy, in the spirit of St. Angela Merici, therefore above all the education of orphaned or abandoned little girls and assistance to the sick in the neighborhood.

The members of the Pious Union did not wear their own specific habit nor did they live in communities, but according to the spirit of the saint from Brescia they formed a lay association which cooperated wholeheartedly with the apostolic activities of the parish.³⁴

Having briefly summarized the *Rule* of the Pious Union, we can ask what it and Frassinetti’s spirituality bequeathed to our own religious family. Let us not forget that for many years, in its formula for profession, the Guanellian Congregation continued to refer to the “Rule in use in the Hospice of Pianello Lario”.³⁵ This happened of course, because Fr. Guanella had not yet received

³⁴ I have summarized excerpts from G. FRASSINETTI, *Regola della Pia Unione della nuove Orsoline, figlie di Maria Immacolata, sotto la protezione di S. Orsola e di S. Angela Merici*, in *Opere Ascetiche*, op. cit., p. 112ff.

³⁵ L. GUANELLA, *Norme principali per un regolamento interno della Piccola Casa 1894*, in *Scritti per le Congregazione...*, op. cit., p. 158.

approval for his Rule, but the long years in which the group he had founded remained exclusively under the influence of Frassinetti's spirituality must have left their mark.

So what did Frassinetti pass on to us? Naturally, what remained was the commitment to favoring the works of the parish: catechesis, parish prayers, the education of little girls and abandoned children, assistance to the sick at home, the promotion of groups and associations in order to encourage specific commitments of piety and zeal. A special devotion to St. Angela Merici and to St. Ursula has also endured.³⁶ The hall mark of 19th century spirituality, mediated by the group through the institutions of Frassinetti who was one of their greatest champions, left an even more vivid impression.

Reading in addition the ascetic writings of Frassinetti, we note the recurrence of several topics which seem to me to have left a mark on our Congregation. Among others, I like to note: Eucharistic Christocentrism, the devotion to the Immaculate Virgin, the practice of a "method of life" based on the harmonious integration of the sacramental life, prayer, mystical practices and apostolic commitment. I also note that our Congregation has preserved in its tradition, practices so strongly recommended by Frassinetti, such as: the use of "ejaculations", and "little Rosaries" to maintain union with God during the day, "visits" to the Blessed Sacrament, the practice of the *Way of the Cross*, of the *Via Matris* and the use of mortification on Saturdays in honor of Mary Most Holy.

³⁶ Cf. *Directory of the Daughters of St. Mary of Providence*, Rome, 1984, n. 96, pp. 208-209.

1.4 *The beginnings of religious life in the Hospice of Camlago*

At this point it is necessary to stress the desires for good which Marcellina cherished in her heart, no less than Coppini. Consecration while continuing to live with the family was not enough for her; she felt a forceful call to give the whole of herself all the time. Therefore she gradually began to tell her friend Maddalena Minatta of her dreams, and to open her heart to her parish priest.

Coppini's first reaction was to prevent one of his best young girls from leaving the parish: her work in the parish was invaluable. At the same time, he realized that Marcellina aspired to an *optimum* that he did not have the right to belittle. So he told the young girl and her friend Maddalena Minatta to be patient. In the meantime he redoubled his studies, reflection, prayers and penance. He asked advice of Msgr. Calcaterra, Vicar General of the Diocese, and then of Fr. Paolo Taroni, Canon of Domaso.³⁷ At last he revealed to the two young girls his plan to establish a small institution in the parish where they could put into practice that full self-giving for which they longed, living a true and proper religious life and undertaking charitable activities. At the same time, they were to be able to continue their ministry for the benefit of the parish institutions. And so that Marcellina could have a taste of religious life, Coppini sent her for a fortnight to the Institute of the "Poor Single Women" in Como, founded by a priest called Fr. Bonoli.³⁸

On October 18, 1872, as Marcellina and Maddalena

³⁷ Witness of Sr. M. Bernucca, CB *Intr. Causae, op. cit.*, p. 89.

³⁸ Cf. Witness of Sr. M. Bosatta, *ibid.*, p. 58.

took possession of the small premises rented by Coppini in Camlago, they exclaimed: "Today is the beginning of the work of our hearts!"³⁹ Thus the Holy Spirit was preparing the ground for the future Guanellian works. It was only an embryo, but it was to show great vitality. With his savings, Fr. Coppini managed to increase slightly the space they had available. On June 15, 1873, the little Hospice was officially erected by the Bishop.⁴⁰

The zealous parish priest, wanting to impress upon the small institution the features of a genuine religious community, asked Canon Rosaz to send two of his sisters to give Maddalena and Marcellina an appropriate start. The two religious, Sr. Maria Chiara and Sr. Maria Vincenza, stayed in Pianello for a year; their contribution was a great help to the new institution. To evaluate the importance of the contribution of Rosaz's two religious, let us read some information about Rosaz and the institute he founded.

"Canon Edoardo Giuseppe Rosaz (appointed Bishop of Susa in 1877), had no sooner been ordained a priest (1854) than he went to the aid of girls who were destitute and abandoned. He conceived of and founded the Retreat of the Poor Daughters of Mary in his native city on July 1, 1856".

³⁹ L. MAZZUCCHI, *Il parroco Don Coppini, op. cit.*, p. 112.

⁴⁰ Cf. L. MAZZUCCHI, *ibid.*, *op. cit.*, p. 114, note: "The erection of the Hospice took place a year later, because in the proceedings of Bishop Carsana's pastoral visit (1876) one reads: "In the parish there is a small orphanage for girls, erected by Monsignor Vicar General and founded on June 5, 1873. It is directed by the parish priest and run by two pious and charitable young girls who are dedicated to it, Marcellina Bosatta and Maddalena Minatta, both of whom are parishioners".

From among those he had taken into this home, he chose candidates for a second foundation, that of the tertiary religious (formally erected in 1882).⁴¹ The Institute of the Tertiary Sisters of St. Francis of Susa,

“right from the start adopted the Rule of the Franciscan Tertiary Order, and its spirituality, like its Founder’s, is of a markedly Franciscan inspiration, due to the importance it gives to the cult of Christ’s humanity, the devotions, and poverty as a means of asceticism”.⁴²

Perhaps Rosaz’s sisters also contributed to putting the final touches to the gradual configuration of our religious family. In fact, Franciscan spirituality had a great fascination for Fr. Guanella himself and for the first sisters in precisely those aspects mentioned above, the cult of the humanity of Christ and the heroic practice of poverty. But we have no proof with which to establish the importance of the contribution made by Sr. Maria Chiara and Sr. Maria Vincenza, who nevertheless left an eternal memory in our Congregation. In the meantime,

“like a good father full of concern and tenderness for the life of his children, Coppini devoted his material savings, his concerns, his free time, his mind and heart to the good of the work”.⁴³

In Camlago, while Marcellina and Maddalena continued to follow the Rule of the Pious Union, they also began to live *more religiosarum*. They lived a

⁴¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁴² M. D’ALATRI, San Francesco, di Susa, (Torino), Suore di, *in Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione*, Vol. VIII, Rome, Paoline, 1988, col. 433.

⁴³ L. MAZZUCCHI, *Il parroco Don Coppini*, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

community life, gave assistance to the house of orphan girls and the elderly they had taken in,⁴⁴ continued to direct the Pious Union of the DMI and to be involved in parish activities. Marcellina was “superior”.⁴⁵ They lived the religious life as Marcellina had learned it at Bonoli’s and as it had been taught to them by Rosaz’s sisters.

1.5 *The first religious profession: June 28, 1878*

In July 1877, Marcellina’s younger sister, Dina, who was completing her novitiate with the Canossian Sisters, was considered unsuitable because of her excessive introversion and timidity. Marcellina, who had herself assumed responsibility for Dina’s education and knew her well, certain of the soundness of her vocation and the depth of the virtues that motivated her, convinced her to enter the Hospice. “It was true Providence!”⁴⁶ Fr. Guanella was to say in his time.

Meanwhile the Institute was continuing to grow, and Coppini thought it right to put the form of life embraced by Marcellina and the sisters on a stable footing. On June 28, 1878, the Feast of the Sacred Heart, the Rite of First Religious Profession took place with a simple and moving ceremony. Marcellina and Dina Bosatta, Maddalena and Elisabetta Minatta committed themselves. They were the first team.

“The habit in which they were clothed consisted of coffee-colored vestments with a black cape and coif; they took the

⁴⁴ Cf. Witness of Sr. M. Bosatta, CB *Intr. Causae, op. cit.* P. 59.

⁴⁵ Cf. Witness of Sr. M. Bosatta, AG *Intr. Causae, op. cit.* p. 78.

⁴⁶ L. GUANELLA, *Non ritornerà più dunque Suor Chiara tra noi?*, Rome, Nuove Frontiere, 1982, p. 118.

names respectively of Sr. Angela, Sr. Clare, Sr. Rosa and Sr. Giacinta.... A fifth, Candida (Sr. Agnese) Morelli was unable to make her profession in the hands of Fr. Coppini; shortly after his death, she received the religious habit from Fr. Leone Ostinelli”.⁴⁷

At that time they were called Ursulines, because they all came from the Pious Union which had been placed under the protection of St. Ursula. At that point, the itinerary of the Pious Union underwent a substantial change: beside the simple DMI who made vows of virginity and continued to live in their family, were those who followed a way of radical self-giving to God with a proper religious profession: these were the four women religious of the Hospice. The DMI gradually became known as secular Ursulines, and the others, the Ursulines of the Hospice. The latter continued to belong to the Pious Union, indeed they took its organization, direction and formation quite particularly to heart, but as professed religious they were to have their own itinerary which was no longer identified with that of the Pious Union,⁴⁸ even if they still followed Frassinetti's *Rule*.

In 1878 the Pious Union of Pianello was aggregated to the See of Brescia, approved by Pope Pius IX, so as to obtain the indulgences granted to this see which had in the meantime become primatial. A new canonical erection by Bishop Carsana took place and on October 27, 1878, all those enrolled made their profession. Along

⁴⁷ L. MAZZUCCHI, *Il parroco Don Coppini, op. cit.*, pp. 118-119..

⁴⁸ “The material concerns of the Ursulines and of the Hospice came under a single management”. Witness of Sr. C. Capelli, *CB Intr. Causae, op. cit.*, p. 217.

with the names of the assembly listed in the *Registro* are also the names of the Ursulines of the Hospice.

Meanwhile, “the Hospice was making progress on its way, despite difficulties and opposition, and asking the heavenly Father for its daily bread”.⁴⁹ On August 27, 1878, Marcellina, as superior, obtained permission to have the *Stations of the Cross* erected in the Hospice chapel.⁵⁰ Coppini thought the time had now come to give the Ursulines of the Hospice their own *Rule* as distinct from Frassinetti’s.

1.6 *The Rule of the Ursulines written by Coppini*

Coppini thought the time had come to request official approval of the group as a religious community, and took the necessary steps with this in mind. On July 10, 1889, he compiled a draft of the *Rule* for the group. He probably submitted the small document to the competent authorities to obtain approval, but his unexpected death must have interrupted the course of its approval. The *Rule* is preserved in a halographic manuscript,⁵¹ in which Coppini urges:

“*Incapite libri scriptum est, ut faciam, Deus, voluntatem tuam*’ (Heb 1:39). At the top of the book is written: ‘O God, that I may do your will!’ May obedience to God and to those he appoints to govern you on this earth” always be written in your hearts, O Ursulines!”

⁴⁹ L. MAZZUCCHI, *Il parroco Don Coppini, op. cit.*, p. 119.

⁵⁰ Cf. *Domanda a Sua Santità Leone XIII per l’erezione della Via Crucis*, manuscript, Pianello Lario, August 12, 1878, AFSMP, Rome.

⁵¹ Cf. C. COPPINI, *Regola per la nuova comunità di Orsoline*, manuscript, Pianello, July 10, 1880, AFSMP, Rome.

The document is divided into three parts: General Rules, Disciplinary Rules, Spiritual Rules.

In the General Rules, he deals with the aims of the community and the nature of its members. The *purpose* is twofold: to sanctify oneself and to attend to the Christian education of the little orphan girls. The women religious also had to be ready to undertake other charitable works such as catechism, assistance to the sick, especially if they were abandoned, both at home and in hospital. They were also obliged to carry out their work during epidemics. With regard to the *nature of the members*, the Ursulines were not to take religious vows. The “firm resolution of virginity, the sincere will to obey and the spirit of sincere poverty were sufficient.

The Spiritual Rules include a definition of the spiritual life of the group. Coppini says:

“Since it is not external profession that forms religious persons but an inner disposition of the spirit, the Ursulines must always keep their spirit well formed by and steeped in the Gospel principles”.

The ten points that follow speak of pious practices, the spirit of prayer, community life. It is affirmed that the Ursulines “must be united in harmony, like true sisters in the Sacred Heart of Jesus, they must truly be ‘*cor unum et anima una*’”.

Coppini’s Rule, which probably never came into the hands of the Ursulines of the Hospice since death unexpectedly truncated the still young and zealous pastor’s projects and activities, is important nonetheless. Indeed, it represents the posthumous codification of the kind of life the community had already been living for some time.

I would like to emphasize Coppini’s insistence on

obedience and humility, virtues which shone so brightly in the life of the sisters of the primitive group. The expression: “This is a house of poverty and work” is particularly beautiful. I would also like to highlight the priority given to the devotion to the Heart of Jesus. In due course we will find these embryos of spirituality and asceticism particularly developed by Guanella, especially the devotion to the Heart of Christ. Guanella himself was to mention it explicitly to Coppini when he built the Church of the Sacred Heart, almost as if it were the spiritual center of his works, and he was to make the devotion to the Heart of the Redeemer a focus of his spirituality.⁵²

1.7 *Sr. Clare enters the Hospice of Camlago: the influence of Canossian spirituality*

When Dina entered the Hospice directed by Marcellina, she brought with her the experience of about seven years of life in the environment of Canossian spirituality. We read in an autographic notebook of Mother Marcellina:

“The year 1871. On August 31, Dina Bosatta went to Gravedona to the Canossians as an assistant and to be instructed as a teacher. She was then 13 years old. In 1876, Dina went to Como to the Canossian novitiate: she was then 18 years old. In 1877, she came to the Hospice in Pianello. She was then 19.... In 1881, Sr. Clare put aside

⁵² Cf. L. GUANELLA, *Un saluto all'anno nuovo 1893*, in «La Provvidenza», January 1893, p. 9.

her religious habit and returned to Gravedona to prepare for examinations to qualify as a teacher”.⁵³

“The Servant of God accepted in the Pianello Hospice in Camlago by her sister, the superior, and on Fr. Coppini’s recommendation and the parish priest Coppini told her to stay there although she explained, even in tears, that she felt called rather to the Canossian Sisters. But after she had settled down, although she had left a convent with plenty of comforts and found herself instead in a cramped place in the midst of such difficulties that our best food was onion soup, Sr. Clare showed herself to be very happy...”⁵⁴

Dina’s reluctance for the Hospice stemmed from the fact that in this tiny, newborn work religious observance was not yet as firmly established as she would have wished. Instead, Dina was attracted by the silence, living spirituality and austerity of the regular, ordered life which she had experienced with the Canossian Sisters, to such an extent that they had had great dreams for the young girl:

“We sisters of Gravedona wanted her and she was dear to us.... Dina felt her unexpected dismissal with deep regret, as did we sisters of Gravedona, and we were very upset about it”.⁵⁵

Certainly, seven years of formation in the environment of the Canossian spirituality must have contributed to molding the young girl’s heart, preparing her for her future mission in the Hospice of Camlago and

⁵³ M. BOSATTA, *Quadernetto autografo*, autographic manuscript, AFSMP, Rome.

⁵⁴ Witness of Sr. T. Brivio, CB *Intr. Causae, op. cit.*, p. 37.

⁵⁵ Witness of Sr. M. Mangini, CB *Intr. Causae, op. cit.*, p. 46.

the Guanellian Congregation. It seems to me that this was also Fr. Guanella's opinion:

"Dina Bosatta is at the convent in Gravedona ... she is timid by nature and at the same time bold in matters of the soul ... the heart of the young girl is being prepared to become a heart like Mary's, feeling great joy, afflicted by deep sorrow. The Lord is working in that heart and preparing it to become a heart resembling the pierced Heart of the divine Savior. It was Providence; she was to be a school and an example for a new retreat".⁵⁶

Providence then prepared Dina for our Congregation, through the Canossian Sisters.

"With me, my sister Dina made ... her religious profession on June 28, 1878, and took the name of Sr. Clare. It took place in the presence of parish priest Coppini, who, since Dina had only been there for a few months, declared that that she had already completed her novitiate with the Canossians".⁵⁷

We know of the heroic commitment of fidelity which Clare dedicated to all things, so it is not hard to deduce that given the upright intention with which she had lived with the Canossian Sisters and her persistent desire to become a religious in that congregation, the young girl must have let herself be deeply molded by the spirituality of Sr. Maddalena of Canossa and must then have transfused it with her life into our Congregation.

Let us take a look at some documents that will help us to verify this hypothesis. The *Rule* followed by the Daughters of Charity of Mother Maddalena of Canossa

⁵⁶ L. GUANELLA, *Non ritornerà...*, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

⁵⁷ Witness of Sr. M. Bosatta, *CB Intr. Causae*, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

in the period when Dina was with them, was that of the so-called “disseminated text”, dictated by the holy Foundress herself and approved in 1820. In the very first pages of the text we see standing out the two great loves of Maddalena di Canossa who were also the passion of our Sr. Clare: Jesus Crucified and Mary of Sorrows.

“Behave then like true Daughters of Mary Most Holy, your Mother of Sorrows, consoling her in her grief with the holiness of your life ... according to the spirit and in imitation of Jesus Christ Crucified”.⁵⁸

Immediately afterwards, speaking of prayer, Mother Canossa says that prayer must set their hearts on fire, in order to

“imitate Jesus Crucified who showed his love for the Father in a most unique way, accepting death and death on a cross”.⁵⁹

The pious exercise that the Canossians had to practice every day was that of the “Commemoration of the seven sorrows of Mary Most Holy”.⁶⁰ “To imitate Jesus Crucified, the sisters were to make “a special profession of holy humility”.⁶¹ Charity to their neighbor which they also had to practice was motivated by the fact that it shines out with a special brightness among the virtues practiced by Jesus Crucified on the Cross.⁶²

⁵⁸ M. DI CANOSSA, *Regole dell'Istituto delle Figlie della Carità*, (the disseminated text), Milan, 1983, pp. 8-9.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 13, 14, 89.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁶² Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

Continuing to read through the 300 pages of text, we come across many such citations.

I do not know whether Fr. Guanella was familiar with Mother Canossa's texts. Nonetheless I think that in characterizing Sr. Clare's spirituality and her unusual mystical path he uses words strongly reminiscent of the Canossa saint's language. In his brief life of Sr. Clare, he presents her as totally fascinated by and sharing in the mystery of the Cross. We read, almost by chance, among the many similar pages:

“Sr. Clare thought to herself: “Although we know that Jesus as God is King of glory and essential bliss, and as man he is the man of sorrows and the Prince of martyrs: he, the captain of martyrdom, holds the standard of the Cross in his right hand and cries with powerful feeling: Anyone who wants to follow me should take up his own cross, lay it over his shoulders and then follow me! What can I, such a wretched sinner do, except follow this path?...”. Sr. Clare felt these reflections like rays of light within her. But the atmosphere around her grew dark, dark and ominous ... she encountered the Face of the divine Savior, bruised and bleeding, and it seemed to her that he was saying: You have reduced me to this state! And then she is said to have fainted, to escape the angry countenance of the Lord”.⁶³

Speaking of Sr. Clare's last illness, Fr. Guanella observed that she spoke little to those who paid her a visit, because “she was absorbed, as though she were having an intimate conversation with three excellent

⁶³ L. GUANELLA, *Non ritornerà...*, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

companions: Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, Blessed Jesus Crucified, Our Lady of Sorrows”.⁶⁴

Sr. Marcellina also linked Sr. Clare’s spirituality to the education she had been given by the Canossian sisters:

“For the Servant of God, the most fervent devotions were to the Sacred Heart of Jesus to which she turned with frequent invocations, and to Our Lady of Sorrows whose image she saw together with that of the Lord’s Passion, on the medallion those sisters wore on their breast”.⁶⁵

Sr. Clare’s spiritual features were not a personal inheritance, but were passed on to the founding group and to our entire religious family through the witness of her life. In the group of the first five religious of Pianello, Sr. Clare was the one with the greatest experience of a “regular” life and she really was a “model” for the others. “Her spirit of observance of the Rule was such that she was a true example”.⁶⁶ Fr. Guanella turned to Sr. Clare to learn what rules were being observed in the Hospice:

“Asked by the director, Mr. Guanella, for information on the principal rules observed in the institute, Sr. Clare gave it to him, and when she returned from the director with his approval and recommendations to observe them, Sr. Clare devoted herself to putting them into practice them as though they had had a loftier value”.⁶⁷

Sr. Clare served as novice mistress in the Hospice. While the practical organization depended essentially on Marcellina, the spiritual formation of both the novices

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁶⁵ Witness of Sr. M. Bosatta, CB *Intr. Causae, op. cit.*, p. 134.

⁶⁶ Witness of Sr. M.. Bosatta *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁶⁷ Witness of Sr. C. Capelli, *ibid.*, p. 240.

and the little orphan girls was entrusted essentially to Sr. Clare”.⁶⁸

“In introducing the Thursday holy hour recalling the mystery of Jesus’ agony in the garden, the Servant of God applied herself with such diligence that all were edified, and it was precisely because of the great edification which emanated from her bearing that this pious practice was and still is fervently maintained in all the houses”.⁶⁹

If we were then to pass to her more particular habits, to the rules of discipline that Sr. Clare applied to the orphan girls and novices, we would find that they closely corresponded to what she was inculcating in them and to the chapter of the Canossian Rule entitled: “The virtue of silence and external composure”, a chapter which certainly must have determined Clare’s habits as aspirant, postulant and novice with the Canossian Sisters. Note, for example, Clare’s continuous insistence that her pupils should not touch each other even in games (to such an extent that even playing dancing games in a ring they had to cover their hands with handkerchiefs!), that they should not climb steps two at a time nor leave their rooms without wearing a special scarf around their neck. The same could be said about the use of particular ejaculatory prayers, rosary beads, pious practices and such like.

At this point, whoever agrees with me that Sr. Clare was deeply influenced by Canossian spirituality and that with her life she then passed on its fundamental aspects

⁶⁸ Cf. witness of Sr. G. Granzella, GB, *Intr. Causae, op. cit.*, p. 264.

⁶⁹ Witness of L. Guanella, *ibid.*, p. 107.

to our Congregation, might perhaps be wondering whether or not it would be permissible to consider Clare a Guanellian and what specific Guanellian elements affected her life and that of our Congregation.

The answer to this query requires a thorough examination, and I believe it will be better addressed when spirituality is discussed rather than history, as we are doing here. However, continuing to be tied to history, I think I can say that the founders were not incorporeal persons, to whom the Spirit of God speaks directly, dictating to their inner selves, but persons who were firmly rooted in their time and history. They were built up by God through the intricate web of the events that occurred around them. Jesus himself did not reject the Jewish tradition, but on the contrary he based the novelty of his Gospel message upon it, maintaining that he had not come to destroy, but to complete.

Fr. Guanella's spiritual direction achieved something similar with Clare and the founding group. He destroyed nothing of what the Spirit had already given them, but strove to bring it to perfection. In particular, by revealing to Clare the *vermis et non homo* which is renewed in the humiliation of so many marginalized creatures, he ensured that she could unite with contemplation of Christ's wounds, concrete action in administering to the wounds of suffering humanity.⁷⁰ The mysticism of the Cross, a way specifically taken by Clare, was to be completed by the typically Guanellian *mysticism of service*.

Thus Clare, obliged every day to go out and teach in

⁷⁰ Cf. L. GUANELLA, *Le vie della Provvidenza...*, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

Dongo which cost her a great effort since she would have preferred withdrawal and contemplation, could say: “The hardest obedience was to go to Dongo, but after that God began to work in me all the favors which I feel”.⁷¹

We can therefore conclude that Guanella’s intervention on Sr. Clare was that final touch of the Spirit of God who in this way brought her to maturity and perfection. What has been said concerning Sr. Clare could be applied to the whole group which passed from Coppini’s hands to those of Fr. Guanella.

1.8 *Fr. Guanella in Pianello: the reasons why he consented to go there*

On July 1, 1881, the parish priest Coppini died prematurely. Fr. Guanella recalls:

“In Gravedona rumors have it that on July 1 the parish priest Coppini died in Pianello Lario, leaving orphaned the Hospice of orphan girls directed by a few pious women”.... A clear thought flashed through Fr. Guanella’s mind which he was fond of repeating: “You will be his successor”.... But the peak of Olmo had been reserved for Fr. Guanella, to prevent him from exercising a dangerous influence. He spent several months there studying theology in solitude and prayer because he felt an acute inner need for it and saw the timid figure of despair approaching. In this rather negative frame of mind, Fr. Guanella thought: “My confreres and even my students are undertaking beautiful enterprises for the glory of God and of souls in Europe and outside it, and what am I doing here?”.⁷²

⁷¹ L. GUANELLA, *Non ritornera...*, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

⁷² L. GUANELLA, *Le vie della Provvidenza...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-53.

Sadly immersed in his thoughts, an invitation arrived from the Bishop asking him to go to Pianello. Fr. Guanella went there in the first half of November 1881.⁷³ But why did he consent to go?

I think I can say that he decided to do so because his heated insistence to the Bishop that he continue the experience of Traona had been in vain:

“Your Excellency several times, in your words and also in your letters, persuades me to leave Traona alone and induces me not to think of institutions”.⁷⁴

However, it should be added that he decided to go because he foresaw that precisely in Pianello he would perhaps be able to put into practice what he had most at heart. In the same letter he continues:

“Given this, if you would like me to go to Pianello, I will do so after All Saints, or if it pleases you, after the feast of St. Martin. From my constant my determination, especially during three years of adversity in Traona, you should be convinced that I am not guided by a spirit of volubility.... For the same period I will still be at your disposal, but

⁷³ It is difficult to be any more precise about the date when Fr. Guanella arrived in Pianello. The sources do not agree. In *Le vie della Provvidenza*, Fr. Guanella recalls vaguely: “It was in October, at 11.00 in the evening, and there was no way of waking those who were asleep.” (p. 55). He himself, in his letter to Bishop P. Carsana written in October 1881, writes: “If you would like me to go to Pianello, I will do so either after All Saints or after the feast of St. Martin”. Fr. M. Cugnasca is more exact: “He arrived in Pianello on the eve of the feast of St. Martin”, *Don Guanella «uomo straordinario...»*, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

⁷⁴ Letter from L. Guanella to Bishop P. Carsana, October 1881, AG, Como.

always expecting divine Providence to unfold new ways to achieve the said work of an institution...”.⁷⁵

Moreover, in an earlier letter of September 4, 1881, he had said: “Some suggested that I take on the parish of Pianello, where I would be able to look after the late Coppini’s institute”.⁷⁶ This indomitable will to dedicate himself to his institutions also in Pianello recurs in his memoirs and his correspondence:

“He went there, but on condition that he should not be invested with the parish, because he did not feel like continuing his work merely within a parish context.... Guanella steadfastly maintained: I will serve the parish, but as a simple administrator! And he said to himself: the more promptly to open my wings as soon as the hour of mercy strikes”.⁷⁷

“I remind you that I stay here ad experimentum until such time as be considered appropriate to ascertain whether God, through the Superior, deigns to guide me on the way of even any kind of institution”.⁷⁸

“What I want is this: an institution, even a small one, in the spirit of Don Bosco or Cottolengo.... I have no complaints of the way I have been treated until now, except that I regret ... efforts are still being made today to dissuade me from my vocation”.⁷⁹

“From Traona, after what happened, I was taking steps to return to Don Bosco when the Ordinary suggested

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Letter from L. Guanella to Bishop P. Carsana, September 4, 1881, ACV, Como.

⁷⁷ L. GUANELLA, *Le vie della Provvidenza...*, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

⁷⁸ Letter from L. Guanella to Bishop P. Carsana, April 17, 1882, ACSG, Rome.

⁷⁹ Letter from L. Guanella to Fr. C. Dell’Oro. June 10, 1882, AG, Como.

Pianello to me, pointing out the precisely the Hospice which I would be able to care for.... I went there, but only for the Hospice”.⁸⁰

“It seems to me that it is as it were the embryo of more than one institution and that in some way it contains the elements and something of the spirit of Cottolengo”.⁸¹

The Hospice in fact was involved in various kinds of apostolates and assistance, all of which corresponded to the ideas Guanella cherished in his heart of hearts. He wrote:

“The Institute has the characteristics of a religious society ... from 1889, the applications for its approval were begun.... It also has the features of a college of education, because there is a school there every day, and a school and prayers on Sundays, mainly for the girls of the village”.⁸²

“The idea of the Founder, Fr. Coppini, was that given the opportunity and with the superior’s consent, care should likewise be devoted to the sick, in epidemics or with contagious diseases, and, in general, to the most ordinary offices and appropriate ministries for the most destitute class”.⁸³ “In the Hospice, in addition to the orphan girls who had been taken in, there was always some chronically ill elderly patient, some relation of theirs, and now there are also a few elderly women”.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Letter from L. Guanella to Bishop P. Carsana, March 19, 1885, AG, Como.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Letter from L. Guanella to Msgr. G. Merizzi, September 21, 1884, ACV, Como.

⁸³ Letter from L. Guanella to Bishop P. Carsana, March 19, 1885, AG, Como.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

From what we read in Fr. Guanella's letters, it clearly appears from that time why he agreed to go to Pianello; and this is why, having arrived there, he felt the full strength of his best energies flooding back to him, so that he could apply himself single-mindedly to his mission.

"I think, since the Ordinary expresses himself as clearly as possible ... at the age of 43, I would like to thank God warmly for every good and also for every evil that has occurred until now, since I am deeply grateful to him who has led me on this path to find what I have been hunting for all over the place until now".⁸⁵

1.9 *Fr. Guanella in Pianello: how he approached the Hospice*

When Fr. Guanella arrived in Pianello "various comments were made in the village since rumors had been circulating of a hot-headed priest from the mountains whom it was better to treat with due caution and keep at a distance rather than to approach."⁸⁶ This attitude inspired by suspicion was common to the locals in general, but especially to the Ursulines in the Hospice.

Fr. Guanella recalls the first visit he made to the Hospice:

"The parish priest of Musso claimed to be the Hospice's protector and director and it was he who took Guanella there for the first time. This visit left Fr. Guanella neither hot nor cold. He acted passively for several months".⁸⁷

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ L. GUANELLA, *Le vie della Provvidenza...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-56.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

In the meantime he devoted all his energy to caring for souls, to planning small ascetic activities, and to prayer:

“Thus he sought to bury his thoughts in intense activity. For some time, he managed the parish of Musso as well as Pianello; he preached Lenten homilies in Morbegno and Dongo and preached here and there on various occasions”.⁸⁸

Let us listen to what Sr. Marcellina says of this delicate period:

What decided me to receive the Servant of God as a Director with full trust, was having been at a special and strange dinner that I saw him give in the parish house.... I told this to my sisters and they also conceived such great respect for him as to recognize him to be precisely cut out for our needs. So when after a year or two we received him as our director, I remember that as Fr. Leone Ostinelli took his leave, he said: “you will regret it!”. And after that Fr. Leone no longer kept up the good relations he had previously had with us. But I must say that I was not always satisfied with Fr. Aloysius. I must also recall that the parish priest of Musso, Fr. Rizzola, had advised us to join some other religious institute. And I also know that the Canossian Sisters of Gravedona had, I think through my sister, Sr. Clare and others, made known their willingness to accept us two sisters in their institute but not the other sisters, to which I objected since I did not want to leave the sisters in the lurch and I should have felt remorse in my heart that by doing this I had wronged the deceased parish priest, our founder”.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ L. GUANELLA, *Le vie della Provvidenza...*, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

⁸⁹ Witness of Sr. M. Bosatta, *AG Super virtutibus*, Rome 1950, p. 10.

How long did this period of mutual waiting between the Ursulines and Guanella last? Marcellina vaguely recalls: “A year or two...”. Fr. Guanella is more exact: “After Easter, the Superior of the Hospice, Marcellina Bosatta, said quite simply: “If you would like to visit us and give a few talks, we would be glad”.⁹⁰ In *Cenni storici* (historical outlines) of 1899, he notes: “The Hospice was only handed over to me after a year”.⁹¹

Fr. Guanella thus began to care for the Hospice as he had wanted.

“He then came for spiritual direction twice a week, giving us instruction and also hearing our confessions when necessary (But this he did in the parish church)”.⁹²

Fr. Guanella had greater difficulty in obtaining the Bishop’s authorization to care for the Hospice. The better to understand the situation, we should read the documentation of this period. It consists of letters between Fr. Guanella and the Bishop, and the priests who were his friends who acted as intermediaries. All this occurred between October 1881 and August 4, 1882. After this there is no further mention of the matter in the correspondence.

In October 1881, Fr. Guanella wrote a long letter to the Bishop. In it he expresses his full disappointment about what happened in Traona: in his opinion, a new attempt ought to have been made. But since the Bishop did not allow this, he therefore asked to return to Don

⁹⁰ L. GUANELLA, *Le vie della Provvidenza...*, op. cit., p. 55.

⁹¹ L. GUANELLA, *Cenni storici dell’Istituzione delle Figlie di S. Maria di Provvidenza in Como*, Milan, Tip. Pia Casa dei poveri, 1899.

⁹² Witness of Sr. M. Bosatta, *AG Super virtutibus*, op. cit., p. 10.

Bosco. This alternative of returning to Don Bosco constantly emerges at moments of crisis, but probably Fr. Guanella recognized it as a temptation, because in the same letter he says: “This being so, I will go to Pianello if that is what you want of me”.⁹³

In November, Fr. Guanella went to Pianello. Around Easter, Marcellina’s famous invitation enabled him to begin to frequent the Hospice for the group’s spiritual direction and he realized their need for more space. He writes to the Bishop:

“We would like to build a kindergarten here where we could put the teachers of the Orphanage in the future. So that you understand, I am sending you the original plan and the estimate. The parish priest of Musso will discuss with you the likelihood of being able to pay for most of it with donations from the locals.

I submit the beginning of the Work to Your Excellency’s judgment. I should like to have an explanation from you in writing as to the norms of conduct I am to adopt with regard to the said Orphanage. You told me in a letter last October that in coming here I could be of use to it. When I became involved, you personally told me to let the teachers handle it. In fact, you are depriving me of my own jurisdiction within the boundaries of the parish”.⁹⁴

Fr. Guanella’s tone is pained, because at the beginning of the letter, he explained the reasons why he could not accept the canonical investiture of the parish.

The Bishop’s answer changed his sorrow to

⁹³ Letter from L. Guanella to Bishop P. Carsana, October 1881, AG, Como.

⁹⁴ Letter from L. Guanella to Bishop P. Carsana, April 17, 1882, ACSG, Rome.

disappointment. It was not sent to Fr. Guanella but to the archpriest of Dongo, to convince him to accept the investiture of the parish. Nor did it contain a single word about the problems of the Hospice, although Fr. Aloysius had explained them clearly; so he complained, once again writing to his superior:

“I sent my last letter of the 17th to Your Most Reverend Excellency as a further attempt to discover your intentions in my regard. You do not mention any detail of mine, and I consider this a fairly clear indication that you are opposed to the propositions contained in my letter. You have done very well to expose me to this definitive trial, and I willingly accept it as an obvious sign henceforth that my vocation is elsewhere”.⁹⁵

Even then there was no reply. In the meantime his priest friends took up his cause. On May 3, 1882, Fr. Nicola Silvestri wrote to Fr. Aloysius to tell him that he shared his sorrow, saying that he had also discussed it thoroughly with Fr. Carlo Dell’Oro, and that they are both of the opinion that:

“Given His Excellency’s opinion in your regard, you should have set your heart at rest and waited in solitude and tranquillity for better times and circumstances to put your plans into practice. One, two, or three years are nothing when one has something concrete to achieve. If you were to stay in Pianello for two or three years in perfect calm, quietly preparing the ground, perhaps you would succeed in your goal, God willing. Moreover, what do you intend to do? To return to Don Bosco? But

⁹⁵ Letter from L. Guanella to Bishop P. Carsana, April 26, 1882, AAG, Como.

remember that you are past 40. And will you be able to adapt?"⁹⁶

Another friend made a move: Fr. Carlo Dell'Oro, knowing that the Bishop would go to Traona, sent him a letter wholly favorable to Guanella via Silvestri, in the hope that the superior would also deign to listen to favorable opinions about Guanella.

"Fr. Guanella seems determined not to accept the canonical institution of the parish benefit in Pianello. He observes that if he has taken this decision, it was not through caprice nor for ill will, nor for money, nor to contradict his Bishop, for whom he professes love and respect, but only because he feels the inclination to return to being a Salesian or at least to find something to do here, after the example and under the direction of Don Bosco for the good of youth, whether they are mischievous, workers, diligent students, etc. This is foremost in Fr. Aloysius' thoughts.... Moreover, I find Guanella a man of heart, of great courage, zeal, and initiative, etc. The people of Pianello consider him a saint and are most apprehensive, for fear that he will have to leave them. The people's love and a few words of encouragement from his superior about his idea of establishing a kindergarten for children when the means are available, then entrusting him with the direction and administration of the orphanage that exists in this parish (always depending on Your Excellency), seems to me the only way to persuade Fr. Aloysius to accept the parish, because he would then be able to act according to his inclinations".⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Letter from Fr. N. Silvestri to Fr. L. Guanella, May 3, 1882, AG, Como.

⁹⁷ Letter from Fr. C. Dell'Oro to Bishop Carsana, May 6, 1882, ACV, Como.

Grateful for his concern, Fr. Guanella wrote to Dell'Oro telling him once again of his plans and disappointment that the Bishop had accepted none of his projects for the Hospice. He was in the depths of despair and humiliation:

“What I want is this: either an institution, even a very small one, in the spirit of Don Bosco or Cottolengo or the foreign missions, otherwise it would be better for me to return to Don Bosco. I have said this constantly since 1878 especially in these parts. And I am really surprised that that holy Bishop says or pretends that he does not understand. I shall wait a little longer and if things do not change, I shall make myself understood. I have nothing to complain of in the way I have been treated until now, except that I regret that having treated me as foolish rather than wise, efforts are still being made today to dissuade me from my vocation”.⁹⁸

However the Bishop continued to ignore the issue of the Hospice. It seems like a dialogue between two deaf persons. The two parties continued on parallels with never a hint of convergence.

On July 21, Fr. Guanella, feeling not only misunderstood but almost mocked, wrote a long appeal which was intended to be a *petition* to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, to explain this lamentable situation.⁹⁹ He sent a copy to Dell'Oro and charged him personally to discuss it with the Bishop.

⁹⁸ Letter from L. Guanella to Fr. C. Dell'Oro, June 10, 1882, AG, Como.

⁹⁹ Letter from L. Guanella to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, July 21, 1882, ASC, 123/Guanella.

This mediation probably held up the whole proceedings. Dell’Oro wrote to him on the Bishop’s behalf Bishop:

“If you want to remain in the diocese, you have your place and may you be able to keep it, since this is the wish of your superiors and your good people. If you subsequently desire to leave the diocese, wishing for a better position (this was the principal motive on which Guanella had insisted in the petition to the Bishops!), the Ordinary would have no problem in issuing you the letters of remission.... With this, I consider I have responded to the questions pertaining to the petition you presented to me...”¹⁰⁰

These are all the direct documents. But we are left with the question: when did Fr. Guanella get the go ahead from the Bishop? I have not succeeded in finding a clearly documented answer to dispel all doubt. In analyzing the following facts, I observe:

- Guanella’s devotion for the Hospice. This is attested by a memorandum regarding the purchase of the Perpentì vineyard, for a possible logistic development of the Hospice, signed by him and by Marcellina. The document is dated March 19, 1883;
- the *request* he made to Msgr. Giacomo Merizzi, Vicar of Como, to obtain permission for the celebration and adoration of the Eucharist in the chapel of the Hospice. It is dated September 19, 1884;
- the *program-report* written by Fr. Guanella to the Bishop on March 19, 1885.

In this text Fr. Aloysius says among other things:

¹⁰⁰ Letter from Fr. C. Dell’Oro to L. Guanella, August 4, 1882, AG, Como.

“And I went there, but only for this Hospice, and then I was kept away from the Hospice for almost a year because of certain misunderstandings, until the Ordinary encouraged me to take a hand in it, that is, more than three years ago now”.

Thus he was “kept away for almost a year” that is, from the end of 1881 to the end of 1882. He was encouraged to take a hand in it “more than three years ago now”. This was on March 19, 1885. Everything induces us to conclude that the famous official “investiture” when he assumed direction of the Hospice took place toward the end of 1882 and the beginning of 1883. This is confirmed by the fact that in March 1883 Fr. Guanella bought the Perpentì vineyard with the intention of giving it to the Hospice as soon as possible.

I believe that this was also the opinion of Fr. Mazzucchi who in his book *Pianello del Lario*, in his presentation of the history of the various parish priests, says briefly but succinctly of Fr. Guanella: “In Pianello ... by restoring life to a tiny local institution (1882) he was able to lay the foundations of his beloved institutes”¹⁰¹ Note the year Mazzucchi puts in parentheses: it is 1882.

Fr. Piero Pellegrino on the other hand sets “the investiture” at a later date, in 1885: “the formal passage to its dependence on Fr. Guanella can be dated to 1885, when it was decided to expand the initial Hospice to Ardenno and then to Como”.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Cf. L. MAZZUCCHI, *Pianello del Lario*, Milan, NED, 1983, p. 140.

¹⁰² Cf. M. CARRERA - P. PELLEGRINI, *Luigi Guanella sulla frontiera dell'emarginazione*, Rome, Nuove Frontiere, 1986, p. 15.

At this point it only remains to await further studies that may cast more light on the subject. So far no direct document has been found that tells us how the Bishop made Fr. Guanella responsible for it.

We should still have one last question to probe: why did the Bishop, although he held Guanella in esteem, insist on keeping him away from the Hospice? If it is true that Guanella's transfer to Pianello was also determined by the aim of removing him from the jurisdiction of the Prefect of Sodrio and putting him under the jurisdiction of Como, what explains this attitude? I think we are left with a single answer.

The Bishop did not want to impose a priest on the Ursulines for whom they had no regard. Moreover, the very priests who had filled the heads of Marcellina and her sisters with "preconceived notions" about Guanella, had probably done the same with the Bishop.

Sr. Marcellina has explained to us that the parish priests of Musso, Fr. Rizzola, and of Crema, Fr. Ostinelli, in whose jurisdiction the Hospice was, were very negative about Fr. Guanella. With regard to the parish priest of Musso, Fr. Rizzola, motives of true jealousy probably existed. On Coppini's death, the Bishop had made him responsible for both the parish and the Hospice. When Fr. Guanella arrived as parish priest, Rizzola, prejudiced by the famous "rumors" and considering himself to be the Hospice's "protector", put pressure on the Bishop to refuse the newcomer jurisdiction over the small institute, to prevent him committing the errors there he was presumed to have made in Traona.

Rizzola's negative conduct, both with the Bishop and with the Ursulines, is probably at the root of this disturbed and painful period of misunderstandings. In fact, the situation was saved only when at last Rizzola,

indignant with the Ursulines who had meanwhile entrusted themselves to Guanella's spiritual direction, decided to hand in his resignation to the Bishop. Rizzola's hostile and jealous attitude to Fr. Guanella is also confirmed to us by the fact that it was he who cited the sisters in court, at the time when Sr. Clare was called to register with the prefecture in Dongo.

According to what Fr. Mazzucchi said, Rizzola had in turn also exercised a negative influence on Fr. Leone Ostinelli, who had even been a fellow student and friend of Guanella's and was very highly esteemed by the Ursulines who considered him "co-founder" of the Hospice together with Coppini and were also to turn to him later for advice.¹⁰³

Even if Ostinelli at first shared Rizzola's feelings, he must have had second thoughts and returned to his former feelings of friendship for Guanella, since it is true that he himself cooperated in reassuring the Ursulines, by showing them testimonials favorable to Guanella, obtained from Canon Anglesio and Don Bosco.

When the Ursulines, won over by Fr. Aloysius' virtue, despite opposition from the priests who were in charge of them, entrusted themselves to the spiritual direction of the new parish priest, they put the Bishop in a condition to review his attitude to Guanella, and so Providence arranged to smooth out his way.

¹⁰³ L. MAZZUCCHI, *La vita, lo spirito e le opere di don Luigi Guanella*, Como, Scuola Tip. Casa Divina Provvidenza, 1920, p. 70.

2. The beginnings and how the Congregation gradually took shape

2.1 *Fr. Guanella in Pianello: the spiritual direction of the teachers and his initiatives*

When Marcellina “entrusted herself” to him, Fr. Guanella began to act for the benefit of the Hospice and the teachers. We shall be able to distinguish a twofold action: of spiritual formation and of practical and administrative organization. The spiritual direction took precedence because it was linked to the pastoral offices which he undertook for the whole parish. Fr. Guanella describes his involvement in the *Biografia* (life) of Sr. Clare:

“For five years I regularly helped the Hospice, giving a talk to the teachers and others on the evenings of feast days, and to the orphan girls.... It seems that what I said comforted their hearts. Sr. Clare listened with keen desire”.¹⁰⁴

A more explicit account of his formation comes from the evidence he gave in the introduction of Sr. Clare’s cause for beatification. His aim was to shed light on the virtues of the young sister, but its reflection enables us to understand the nature of the spiritual direction he provided for the advantage of Clare and her companions.

“After listening to the explanation of the divine Word, the Servant of God always endeavored with special notes and other means to put into practice what she had happened to hear; she then did so in a most particular manner when it

¹⁰⁴ L. GUANELLA, *Non ritornerà...*, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

was a question of lectures given especially for the religious, supremely, in the practical examinations of the Spiritual Exercises.... I would also like to add that because of the effect of the edification I derived from the Servant of God in this, I began to compose a *religious catechism*.... Inspired throughout by the remarkable example and events of the Servant of God's spiritual life, I wrote the booklet *Nel mese dei fiori* (in the month of the flowers).... As I had to do a study or a summary of the Works of St. Teresa, and publish it for the good of the religious life!"¹⁰⁵

Another witness, given this time during the proceedings for information on the virtues of Fr. Guanella himself, notes:

"The Servant of God, as I have heard from the first sisters, immediately lent a hand in reforming the spirit of the institute itself and did all he could to be able to accept new postulants.... He began to provide a new rule of life, a little stricter so as to safeguard the seclusion of their house. He himself suggested topics of meditation to the sisters.... He encouraged in these daughters the spirit of sacrifice, the imitation of Jesus Christ and Our Lady and penance: he suggested means of penance such as wearing sackcloth, in order to attract the Lord's blessings. He inculcated prayer, meditation, and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and he himself set an example of it"¹⁰⁶

Consequently Guanella's work of formation was so intense as to lead Clare and her sisters to true heroic virtue. This was the novitiate period for our Congregation. When Pianello is considered the "cradle" of the institute, this is not only intended to mean that it

¹⁰⁵ Witness of L. Guanella, CB *Intr. Causae, op. cit.*, p. 103.

¹⁰⁶ Witness of Sr. M. Habicher, AG *Intr. Causae, op. cit.*, p. 189.

was here that our Congregation came into being. There is a desire above all to affirm that here in Pianello the Guanellian spirit was grafted onto Coppini's little group, the founding group, and with it the whole congregation received the first fruits of Guanellian formation; here especially the spiritual and apostolic foundations of our religious family were laid.

In this period, Fr. Guanella did not yet have to face the very serious problems of establishing and providing for colossal institutions as was later to be the case. He had only the parish and the five Ursulines to whom to dedicate his best energies and activity. From his own heart, he abundantly poured into the hearts of the young religious the ideal which surged up from within it and so the founding group received the grace of becoming co-sharers in Guanella's spiritual and apostolic plans.

Fully able to open his heart to that group of generous women, Fr. Guanella confided to them: "You are the first persons who have ever really understood me!"¹⁰⁷ This was essentially the level at which Fr. Guanella placed himself as founder, and with his *charism* he shaped those Ursulines, making them sisters who were to become the Daughters of St. Mary of Providence.

Another sign of Fr. Guanella's involvement in formation for the benefit of the religious of the Hospice, was the *request* that he made to the Vicar General of Como on September 19, 1884, to authorize the Hospice to "erect an internal, private chapel and the privilege to celebrate Holy Mass and to preserve the most august Sacrament there". Unfortunately his request was not granted, but it is a sign of the Eucharistic zeal which Fr.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*.

Guanella inspired and which was lived by the founding group.

The following event, mentioned by Mazzucchi and also recorded by the Founder in his *Memorie autobiografiche* (autobiographical memoirs), gives us an idea of how bold Guanella's spiritual direction actually was):

“His passionate soul, until now restrained by the painful distortions of his superiors' dislike, was so enthralled by the enthusiasm of love he had dreamed of that in 1884, that when the cholera broke out in Naples, in one of those heroically sublime initiatives of sacrifice which are made daily by the children of the Catholic Church, he longed to take part in that realm of efforts and supreme sacrifice with the larger religious families and offered Cardinal Sanfelice of that city the assistance, which however was not accepted, of his religious in Pianello Lario”.¹⁰⁸

Guanella the “founder” was now operating in full force. One of the testimonies we have read mentions the “reform” he introduced; we can in fact speak of a true and proper “re-foundation”. Indeed, the small group of sisters was on the verge of breaking up. Fr. Guanella's intervention gave them fresh energy and new ideals; the force of the charism working within him was also transmitted to them. Through religious catechism and the explanation of God's Word, Fr. Guanella enabled them to share in his own way of understanding God and the great truths of the faith. By his contribution to the organization of their community life and by strengthening their apostolic life, Fr. Guanella oriented

¹⁰⁸ L. MAZZUCCHI, *La vita, lo spirito e le opere...*, *op. cit.*, p. 77.
Cf. L. GUANELLA, *Le vie della Provvidenza...*, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

the group to basing their life on *prayer* and *suffering* in a vital synthesis of prayer and activity, inspired by *charity*.

On the subject of Fr. Guanella's intervention in the group of Coppini, Mazzucchi says: "by restoring life to a tiny local institution (1882) he was able to lay the foundations of his beloved institutes".¹⁰⁹ It was therefore a question of "new life" and of "foundation". The sisters' offer to go to the aid of those with cholera and their expansion to Ardenno, enable us to touch the quick of this "reform" achieved by Fr. Guanella. While the Coppini group was born for the parish to which it restricted its activities, now through Guanella's intervention, these few religious had the audacity to offer themselves for far broader horizons of work and were keen to expand on a wide scale. From being a small parish and local congregation, it acquired a universal character.

The religious catechism, published in 1885 with the title: *Il fondamento*, gathers together, "roughly speaking", the formation Fr. Guanella gave the first group of sisters. It was in fact written "for souls who aspire to perfection", and explicitly dedicated to the "Daughters in this parish of Pianello Lario who have retired from the world".¹¹⁰ In my opinion, *Il fondamento* is more important for us for the formative method it describes than for its content in itself (probably inspired by texts already in circulation, although it has some most original pages).

¹⁰⁹ L. MAZZUCCHI, *Pianello del Lario, op. cit.*, p. 140.

¹¹⁰ L. GUANELLA, *Il fondamento o catechismo per le anime che aspirano a perfezione*, Como, Scuola Tip. Divina Provvidenza, 1914, dedication.

The choice of dedicating the catechism to his religious as a specific formation text, reveals Fr. Guanella's concept, today clearly explained by the Second Vatican Council, that religious life is not only a radical way of living Baptism and the Gospel. It is an annotation of a formative method which today comes to us from several sources, but it is lovely for us to receive it directly from the Founder.

In making an analytical interpretation of the text and grouping together the opinions that run through it, I became clearly convinced that *Pregare e Patire* (prayer and suffering) was not only the Father's last will and testament but the program of his whole life. In fact, the terms that most frequently recur in it are: *prayer* and similar words. The next most frequent are the terms: *sacrifice*, suffering and mortification. Then comes the word *obedience* immediately followed by *humility*. These are the tones of spirituality and asceticism which emerged from the Founder's heart as he meditated upon the truth of the faith and passed it on to be the nourishment of his daughters.

His ideal was *apostolic charity*, that is, charity as it is practiced by the protagonists of love of neighbor, which is an incentive to become an apostle. And among these protagonists it was the "Venerable Cottolengo" who most fascinated Guanella and with him, Jerome Emiliani, Vincent de Paul, Francis Xavier, etc.

Other terms that constantly recur in the text are *joy*, consolation, bliss and so forth. In this regard I would like to quote a text that is a hymn of exultation:

"The fish *plays* in its waters and the bird triumphs in its skies. May your heart O Philotea, *silently delight* in thinking of the Lord your God. The dearest little one is the

merriest with his Father. May you *celebrate* the heavenly Father so that heaven and earth *exult with joy*.”¹¹¹

But let us now go on to analyze the practical initiatives. As a practical man with a remarkable capacity for organization, in his weekly visits to the Hospice, while Fr. Guanella was satisfied with the fervor of spirit and sacrifice, he also noted the faults, needs, and requirements that emerged. Right from the start he explained to the Bishop the need for greater space:

“We would like to build a kindergarten here, where we could place the teachers of the Orphanage in the future. So that you understand, I am sending you the original plan and the estimate”.¹¹²

This is why he purchased the Perpentì vineyard and in the records, we learn of the various steps taken to increase the Hospice’s space:

“For several reasons, the house-home in Camlago was not really suitable. It was sold and the Hospice was moved to the house of the chaplaincy in front of the church and then to the Mazzucchi house, which formerly belonged to the Bernucco family, in the village of Calozzo”.¹¹³

A reliable document of Guanella’s intentions with regard to the Hospice is the report-program report of March 119, 1885. On March 12, Fr. Aloysius had been received by the Bishop who asked by him to put down in writing his ideas about the Hospice. Fr. Guanella did so in a long text which was also signed by Sr. Marcellina,

¹¹¹ L. GUANELLA, *Il fondamento... op. cit.*, p. 75.

¹¹² Letter from L. Guanella to Bishop P. Carsana, April 17, 1882, ACSG, Rome.

¹¹³ L. GUANELLA, *Le vie della Provvidenza... op. cit.*, p. 60.

entitled: "Program-Report of the development of the pious Hospice of the Ursulines in Pianello Lario".¹¹⁴ The main objective that spurred Guanella to write was the "possible development" of the Hospice. The most appropriate line of action for him was the following:

"If Providence were to open the way to the center and the outskirts of the town, it seems that this Hospice would be in a more suitable place".

Guanella felt the urge for a mission which could not be enclosed within the bounds of a small village. The Hospice in Pianello did indeed respond to the inclination of his vocation, but his desires swept over much vaster horizons. He notes with joy:

"In the pious home of Pianello there were never more than 24 persons ... and yet they formed as it were in embryo a small Cottolengo institution".¹¹⁵

However the embryo needed help in order to grow, so that it could demonstrate all its vital energies.

The first attempt at expansion was made in 1885 to Ardennes, where his brother Fr. Lorenzo was parish priest. He had made an explicit request to Fr. Aloysius. The Bishop, now on his side, blessed the project.¹¹⁶ Fr. Aloysius sent Sr. Marcellina, Sr. Clare and the young postulant or novice, Maria Buzzetti, there. An absolutely original style emerged in this first attempt at expansion:

¹¹⁴ Cf. Letter from L. Guanella to Bishop P. Carsana, March 19, 1885, AG, Como.

¹¹⁵ L. GUANELLA, *Non ritornerà...*, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Letter of L. Guanella to Fr. Lorenzo Guanella, August 3, 1885, AG Como. Overleaf is the approval of Bishop P. Carsana, dated August 7, 1885.

that of directly immersing candidates in the activities, giving them formation through a practical apprenticeship in works of mercy. This Guanellian way of imposing involvement in powerful apostolic experiences during initial formation could of course have been due to what was required by urgent need, but it is a factor we are offered by the history of our origins and on which we should reflect through our duty of fidelity. In Como, what we now say with regard to Maria Buzzetti, was to become a normal practice for most of the novices.

The Ardenno endeavor lasted less than a year, because “while interference from the parish did not contribute anything at all to the sisters’ maintenance, it threatened the autonomy of the work managed by virtue of deprivations”.¹¹⁷ Nonetheless it remains symbolic by revealing to us the true spirit of our origins. We can get the flavor of it from the witness of Elvira Rettaggi, the teacher in charge of the school of Ardenno, who shared the sisters’ miserable lodgings. This testimony concerns Sr. Clare, but it is easy for us to understand the tone of the group:

“The Servant of God came to Ardenno with two others; I ran the school ... the sisters gathered the girls and taught them sewing and the catechism at home. Sr. Clare darned with great patience although she had problems with her sight ... she worked very hard, especially embroidering flowers, until late when the light was failing.... In the house I saw great poverty ... for food, certain unsavory soups ... there were three sisters or even four and only two

¹¹⁷ M. ALBINI-CROSTA, *Fiore di Cielo*, Como, Scuola Tip. Casa Divina Provvidenza, 1910, p. 70.

single beds.... Sr. Clare frequently had to pick over the heads of the girls who had lice...”¹¹⁸

Meanwhile the sisters had been remarkably active in Dongo, through the teaching work previously undertaken by Sr. Clare. Let us remember this fact in the context of the initiatives Fr. Guanella undertook in Pianello, to shed light on another constant of his activity: the outreach of the Guanellian works in the vicinity and the neighboring districts. Neither in Pianello nor subsequently were Guanellian houses ever closed in on themselves, absorbed by the work of internal assistance alone. The sisters who, of course, did not neglect to help in the environment of their own house, also dedicated themselves energetically to activities of human advancement and spiritual animation in the area, in the parishes and in organizing prayers on Sundays. We will see that the work of children's kindergartens, aiming precisely to put the sisters, through these kindergartens, at the service of the entire local and parish community, was subsequently to gather a particular momentum.

I would lastly like to highlight Guanella's intense vocational activity in this period. Both Mazzucchi and Albini Crosta, in their biographies respectively of Fr. Coppini and Sr. Clare, say that Fr. Guanella won many young girls over to his ideals. Albini Crosta even includes in the appendix to *Fiore di cielo*, his life of Sr. Clare, the descriptions of 70 sisters, almost all convinced of the ideal by Guanella, who had all or almost all died at a very

¹¹⁸ Witness of E. Rettaggi, *CB Intr. Causae, op. cit.*, pp. 78-79. An earlier witness also by Rettaggi says: "There were also others living alternately in the same house: Sr. Marcellina Bosatta... a certain Giovanna and a Maria Galbusera". *Ibid.* p. 8.

young age, and who imitated the virtues of Sr. Clare herself.¹¹⁹

Fr. Guanella's commitment to the vocations apostolate is documented by an abundant correspondence which he kept up with Marianna Galbusera of Morbegno at this time. There are 30 letters overall,¹²⁰ written over about four years, from 1885 to 1889. Through them Fr. Aloysius played an effective role in spiritual direction to the young girl's advantage. The correspondence gives us a very interesting glimpse of "how" and "how much" Fr. Aloysius dedicated himself to vocational promotion for the benefit of the Hospice and indirectly gives information of his intentions and activities.

I cite from only one letter, that of November 2, 1885. Fr. Aloysius was truly persistent in his proposal. Not only does he stimulate the young Galbusera to make take a vocational decision, but he wants her to become an effective promoter of vocations herself.

"Make sure you do not delay. Give your companions all my greetings. Couldn't you win over the younger Mambretti girl for this Hospice? Oh, if she came and were good, what a lot of good she would do! I tell you in confidence that we will probably be opening two more houses. Say lots and lots of prayers. Come and bring other nice girls, the Del Fedele girl and that servant of Michelangelo, Mrs. Brisa, if she is really good. And if she is good may the Tarabini girl come, but make her obtain written permission from her father for her acceptance. Can't Colomba hurry up?"¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Cf. M. ALBINI-CROSTA, *Fiore di Cielo*, *op. cit.*, p. 210ff.

¹²⁰ Cf. Letters from L. Guanella to M. Galbusera, AG, Como.

¹²¹ Letter from L. Guanella to M. Galbusera, November 2, 1885, AG, Como.

It is really lovely to see his fervent appeal for the mission. Many of these young girls responded positively and were to be doves in the new congregation.

2.2 *The approach to Como*

Fr. Guanella saw the need for the Hospice to develop, first of all from a logistic point of view: “There are more and more little orphan girls. There are 25 of them, and to receive other requests the community is waiting to enlarge their building”.¹²² But an improvement in quality is also required, to reinforce and express the vital energies of the Hospice itself: “It seems to me to be as it were an embryo rather than a single institution”.¹²³

The expansion of Ardenno was to be but a brief experience, no more than an apprenticeship. Fr. Guanella clearly discerned his path: “If Providence were to open our access to the center or outskirts of the town, this seems a more suitable location for the Hospice”.¹²⁴

Thus between 1885 and 1886, Fr. Aloysius set himself in motion to try and put his plan of expansion into practice.

“Fr. Guanella had sought any kind of place in the town, such as a chaplaincy in Como hospital for example, but he was answered: “Wherever Fr. Guanella steps in he immediately stirs up a revolution, it is better to keep him at a distance”; “he is always half crazy”.... Fr. Guanella had to appear before the procurator....

¹²² Letter from L. Guanella to Msgr. G. Merizzi, September 19, 1884, ACV, Como.

¹²³ Letter from L. Guanella to Bishop P. Carsana, March 19, 1885, AG, Como.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

Now, before the judge could open his mouth, Fr. Guanella felt overcome by seven spirits and shouted loudly that for more than 15 years an innocent man had been persecuted and in the meantime he banged his mountain-peasant fists on the table and caused the procurator's wife to come running to him. She said: "What did that priest do and what are you doing to him?". The procurator suddenly said, "Take him to the Prefect".

To Guala, the Prefect, Fr. Guanella repeated the scene, whereupon Guala asked him: "So what do you want to do in Como?". And Fr. Guanella heard himself saying things that he could never have imagined, and added: "I want to found an institute for poor servants", and there and then explained the needs of the servants and the desires of their lordly employers. Then Guala ended: "I like the idea and will recommend it to the Bishop, and if needs be, in the city". With this remark the gates of Como ... were opened to Fr. Guanella".¹²⁵

The correspondence of this period discloses Guanella's intense activity to expand the Pianello Hospice. He wrote to Marianna Galbusera on October 21, 1885:

"A rather threatening storm has just blown over and this Hospice's affairs are going slowly but surely.... I tell you in confidence that another two houses will probably be opened!"

Perhaps the "storm" weathered was that of the summons of the sisters and Sr Clare to the Prefecture of Dongo (in the autumn). The two houses to which he was alluding could be Como and Traona, which he continued to yearn for.

¹²⁵ L. GUANELLA, *Le vie della Provvidenza...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-62.

On 19 February 1886, he wrote a lovely letter to Mr. Francesco Mazzotti who had been appointed prefect precisely with jurisdiction over Traona. He is glad that he has been named prefect and tells him of his grandiose plans. In this letter he no longer suggests two houses, but even three. And he makes the most of the occasion to make even the prefect's daughter the object of his vocational promotion. The letter is also worth reading because in it Guanella reveals the sentiments of deep humility that motivate him even if he does not abandon his dreams of grandiose undertakings:

“That holy prefects might exist I have never doubted, but that one should have turned up in Traona, in Traona where there was always a presumption of success at the cost of the poor priest, this I did not expect.

But now that you have come, I thoroughly congratulate you. And with mine, I am sending a letter from another Prefect, Mr. Piccono, an acquaintance who was my colleague in Turin and is now a missionary priest in Patagonia, and I take the liberty of sending you what he has written, for in seeing it you will be encouraged. But don't believe anything good he says about me at all, for I am no more than an abyss of nothingness and wretchedness. I was recently sick for a while as I deserved, but not sick enough and now I have recovered.

Instead, please convey my congratulations and good wishes to your wife and children.

And tell your daughters that if one of them should want to lend a hand and God calls her to do so, that we shall immediately be establishing a convent in Traona, that part of a house is already there waiting, and that I have made arrangements for some of the staff by transferring them from here and from Ardenno, where the two small Houses of St. Joseph and Our Lady have been opened; soon we shall be founding another in Como, where I am expected

this coming week, and another in Valtellina, we hope during the year. But they are tiny institutions, content to wash some poor wretch's rags and to clean the eyes of those poor people who cannot see daylight too well.

Recommend me to St. Francis, and as you stand on the esplanade or square of St. Francis, smile at the Saint wishing me well; your useless servant, Fr. L. Guanella".¹²⁶

Providence was visibly taking the situation in hand. Indeed Fr. Guanella could "say things he could never have dreamed of saying". Henceforth the way to Como lay ahead and Fr. Aloysius set out on it with determination. We know nothing about the ecclesiastical authorities, but they were probably favorable, or the favor of the civil authorities and particularly Guala's must have been the panacea in ecclesiastical circles.

Together with Fr. Aloysius, the other protagonist of the approach to Como was Sr. Marcellina. From her we hear some details:

Fr. Luigi and I first came to Como and rented a small house from a certain Mr. Biffi, in the street that was then called Tommaso Grossi Street: then some orphan girls from Pianello came immediately by boat with two aspirants (Maria Mambretti, teacher in Morbegno, who then changed her religious house and is currently in Rome), Martina Silvetti from Pianello and another I cannot remember. Fr. Luigi Guanella had given them a relic and blessed it before they left. And I returned with him to Como on the first steamer the following morning. When we arrived in Como, Fr. Luigi bought a few beds with metal frames. Sr. Clare was then in Ardenno and came to

¹²⁶ Letter from L. Guanella to F. Mazzotti, February 19, 1886, AG, Como.

Como in the month of May, while we had arrived in April 1886.”¹²⁷

The Guanellian style of entrusting the mission to very young persons who were having their first experience of Guanellian life became more and more evident. These were extremely weak people, in whom nevertheless Fr. Luigi instilled such enthusiasm and faith as to make them true foundation stones; so much so, that many reports of the period do not even take into account that these young women were only aspirants or novices, and already call them “sisters”.

A commemorative speech of thanksgiving to Providence given by Fr. Callisto Grandi, the parish priest of St. Agatha in Como, specifies that Sr. Marcellina and Fr. Guanella “entered into the contract to purchase a house with large grounds here in Tommaso Grossi Street.. on a cold day, February 25, 1886”.¹²⁸

Fr. Guanella always attributed the divine favor that accompanied him in this expansion of the Work of Pianello to Como to the merits of Sr. Clare. This is what he wrote:

“I must declare that thanks to the prayers and sacrifices of the Servant of God in whom I placed such reliance, with the visible help of Providence I was able to achieve my intention of seeing the foundation of this House of Divine Providence built and reinforced with no other material

¹²⁷ Witness of Sr. M. Bosatta, CB *Intr. Causae, op. cit.*, p. 64.

¹²⁸ C. GRANDI, *La Divina Provvidenza glorificata nella sua Piccola Casa in Como il 25 ottobre 1894*, in «La Provvidenza», December 1894, p. 205. The deed of purchase n. 13,810 was signed on July 29, 1886, at the office of the notary Felice Camozzi in Como by Antonio Buffi, Luigi Guanella, Marcellina Bosatta, Dina Bosatta; AG, Como.

support than the lack of means, contradiction, the keenest opposition of the authorities, even the ecclesiastic authorities, and the mockery of my confreres in the ministry. I do not mention the privations and hardships to which the religious themselves were subjected; but I received such great assistance from divine Providence, obtained by these sacrifices and by the prayers of the Servant of God who even vowed to give up her life (a sacrifice which seems to have been accepted by God, since his servant died after a year), as to obtain the growth of the newly founded work so that in a short time the House here in Como became larger than had been expected".¹²⁹

The beginning of the institutions in Como was considered by Fr. Guanella and the first group as a key moment in the Congregation's development. It was an integral experience that came to be considered a true and proper foundation. "He was at last able to remain in Como and lay the foundations for that whole complex of institutions which are still admired today".¹³⁰ Leonardo Mazzucchi decisively affirms: "In 1886 he started his work in Como".¹³¹

2.3 *The features of the Congregation in the first years of Como*

The house in Como started out with two permanent sisters under the supervision of Sr. Marcellina who visited them regularly.

¹²⁹ Witness of L. Guanella, CB *Intr. Causae, op. cit.*, p. 24.

¹³⁰ L. GUANELLA, *Cenni storici sull'origine della Piccola Casa della Divina Provvidenza 1898*, manuscript, AG, Como.

¹³¹ L. MAZZUCCHI, *Pianello del Lario, op. cit.*, p. 140.

“Sr. Clare came to Como in the month of May, while we had arrived in April 1886. I was superior here. When I was absent, the superior was Sr. Clare.... Sr. Clare understood the importance of directing the house and considered herself inadequate to be its head but she did everything through a spirit of obedience and trusting in divine Providence”.¹³²

The two permanent sisters were Sr. Rosa Minatta and Sr. Clare: one was in charge of the orphan girls and the other, the postulants and novices.

To get an idea of how their religious life and charitable activity developed during the first years in Como, let us read excerpts from the testimonies for the beatifications of both Sr. Clare and the Founder.

“Having arrived here I found the bare necessities. Not enough rooms for everyone, for a chapel we had a corridor with a little altar prepared by Sr. Clare; to rest, the two sisters, that is the Servant of God and Sr. Rosa Minatta, each slept in a room respectively with the orphan girls or the novices. Each had her own bed, but when there were not enough beds because of an influx of people in the house, some were even put in the hallways, and Sr. Clare, with the postulants, retreated to the attic, where they slept on boards. They stayed there all summer then left in the winter, including Sr. Clare who fell ill immediately afterward or almost. As for food we had bread, polenta and soup. We went out of the house for work.... In the morning Sr. Clare woke us and gave us some lunch which we took in pails, and went immediately to St. James for the first Mass and to take Holy Communion (during which time, none of happened to see disappearing the pails of

¹³² Witness of Sr. M. Bosatta, CB *Intr. Causae, op. cit.*, pp. 64-65.

soup that we had left just inside the church near the holy water stoup), then we went to work...”¹³³

What were the Congregation’s features at that time?

“Since the civil authorities proved contrary at the time.... The Servant of God described the house in Como as a small company of persons at the service of the city’s families although they were living as a community. This is how she succeeded in obtaining the *nulla osta* from the civil authorities. But this did not prevent the house from keeping its aim.”¹³⁴

“The members ... put their hearts into working at any cost and in succeeding or dying. The Congregation’s aspirants did their novitiate working as servants in well-to-do families and by serving the sick day and night for a few months here and there, even in fairly distant villages. Some, to earn a few lire a day, even worked in the silk mills”¹³⁵

Therefore the novitiate was *sui generis*: the young postulants or novices were trained rather by their direct, energetic and heroic involvement in fulfilling the mission both in the house and outside it than by theoretical studies. Their work and *efforts* were constant, so was their prayer. It was *Pregare e Patire* in action.

“In the house, many sick persons were taken in as well as the little orphan girls, so that right from the start we had a kind of small hospital, with around twenty sick old women”¹³⁶

¹³³ Witness of Sr. G. Granzella, CB *Intr. Causae, op. cit.*, pp. 75-76.

¹³⁴ Witness of Sr. G. Papis, AG *Super Virtutibus, op. cit.*, pp. 303-304.

¹³⁵ L. GUANELLA, *Le vie della Provvidenza...*, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

¹³⁶ Witness of Sr. M. Bosatta, CB *Intr. Causae, op. cit.*, p. 66.

The practical service of the mission prevailed and this was a Guanellian formation. But they did not lack a correct formation in the strict sense of the word. Some of those who worked outside the house returned to the community at midday, others in the evening or at the weekend. Those who spent a few months far from the community to assist the sick in their homes or for domestic service later returned for a more intense period of formation. This formation was provided by either Fr. Guanella or Sr. Clare.

Sr. Clare stayed in the house. Thanks to her, together with heroic sacrifice, an atmosphere of intense prayer prevailed in the house, side by side with heroic sacrifice, fraternal charity, and extreme poverty, but seasoned with a firm trust in Providence.

“As for the progress of the house and its growth, we lived with trust in Providence. I heard Sr. Clare say: now we are poor, but as we forge ahead we will see Providence showering down. We must trust in Providence”.¹³⁷

“In the house, thanks to God and Sr. Clare’s edification ... the bond of charity was always preserved; and if it from time to time it was necessary to deal with some disagreement, discrepancy or misunderstanding, either I or the superior made use of Sr. Clare’s subtle intervention”.¹³⁸

As well as being vice superior, Sr. Clare was also the “teacher”.

“In the meantime one of the Servant of God’s most diligent concerns was to gather the sisters and the postulants when they returned from work, to comfort

¹³⁷ Witness of Sr.G. Granzella, *CB Intr. Causae, op. cit.*, p. 76.

¹³⁸ Witness of L. Guanella, *ibidem*, p. 210.

them and urge them to make the necessary sacrifices in those conditions, essential if we were to face the requirements and difficult circumstances of the house at that time”.¹³⁹

Sr. Clare thus carried out a formative activity in daily life, in the small and large matters of practical living; On the other hand, Fr. Guanella opened his heart to the boundless horizons of charity which never says “enough”! In fact, although he still had his parish commitments in Pianello, in Como he continued that intense work of formation which he had begun in Pianello:

“Life for the sisters in those early times was hard and full of sacrifices, but it was seasoned with the spirit of prayer and mortification and sustained by the continuous admonishments and exhortations of the Servant of God who frequently came down from Pianello to encourage and comfort them”.¹⁴⁰ “The Servant of God also made his exhortations to his sisters shine with the ardor of charity which so distinguished him. When he gave them instructions, he turned to them asking whether there were any souls among them who wanted to become cornerstones.... These souls were to be consecrated as victims of supplication for the success of that house”.¹⁴¹

Fr. Aloysius had no legal worries in this period. His main objective was to enkindle in hearts the very love of the Heart of Christ and generously to spread the

¹³⁹ Witness of Sr. R. Bosatta, *ibidem*, p. 83.

¹⁴⁰ M. CUGNASCA, *Don Guanella «uomo straordinario...»*, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-51.

¹⁴¹ Witness of M. Albini-Crosta, *AG Super Virtutibus*, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

kingdom of charity. And with regard to this supreme ideal he had the grace and gift to know how to focus the hearts and energies of generous persons who gave themselves without reserve. Here, in my opinion, the full force of Fr. Guanella's *charism* was expressed. The "regular" organization of religious life, the codification according to canon law happened later, when Fr. Aloysius foresaw that the official recognition of the Church would increase his Work further.¹⁴²

The organization of religious life, consisting of schedules, the stages of formation and observances, took place above all on the initiative of Sr. Clare, who had had a long apprenticeship with the Canossians; and of Sr. Marcellina and the founding group who had received instruction for a year from Rosaz's sisters, and had had good practice during the long years in Camlago. Moreover, with regard to "regular" religious life, Fr. Guanella only had the experience with Don Bosco, which was in any case limited, since the Salesian Institute at that time (1875-1878) was not completely structured. His "competence" in this field was therefore more limited than that of the sisters. This is why he himself attributed the merit and burden of formation at that level essentially to Sr. Clare:

"The spiritual and ordered life of the institute ... depended above all on Sr. Clare who was vice superior, while her sister, the superior, attended rather to its practical administration".¹⁴³

¹⁴² Cf. Letter from L. Guanella to Msgr. T. Valfrè, September 19, 1896, ACV, Como.

¹⁴³ Witness of L. Guanella, *CB Intr. Causae, op. cit.*, p. 210.

The loose structure of life in those early times should not however be considered as synonymous with scarce attention to formation. Far from it! It was on the contrary a formation which focused directly on the essentials and on radical adherence to the Gospel. We can grasp the depth of this formation by continuing to read Guanella's correspondence with Marianna Galbusera. The young woman had finally entered, and like the others was doing her novitiate while being in domestic service with a family. Fr. Guanella continues to guide her with his spiritual direction and the novitiate he made her undertake was particularly demanding:

“Wherever you may be, speak briefly and converse only as much as charity requires...”.

“When you cannot do the four hours of prayer, both aloud and silent ... pray during the day with a few hours of silence.... When you go home at midday and in the evening, be very outgoing and cordial with the sisters and the orphans.... Offer your life especially to God, so that he may bless these tiny works which have been started” .¹⁴⁴

Having overcome the emergency state of the very first arrival in Como, Fr. Guanella's first concern was the novitiate.

“The novitiate was very dear to him. Although he was not always able to attend directly to the formation of the novices and although he trusted the novice mistress, he nonetheless expected the sisters not only to be formed in the spirit already mentioned, but to be ready, quick, clean, and he reprimanded even the slightest sign of ambition. He took great care of the spiritual formation of the sisters.

¹⁴⁴ Letter from L. Guanella to M. Galbusera, October 20, 1886, AG, Como.

When he had just arrived to visit the houses we would gather for a talk; in the evening he led our meditation, and before he left he again gathered the council of the house”.¹⁴⁵

An overall look at the Congregation’s features in these early years in Como reveals the effects of this formation on the mission. They were outlined by an acute observer who visited the Little House in 1894:

“Perhaps I will not seem credible, but yet this is true: I was carried away by this House, filled with such affection that I cannot find words to express it.

Those dormitories full of beds of every size and shape with their covers of every quality and color, and yet so well arranged and kept as to oblige one to admire the order and cleanliness as much as the poverty and wretchedness.... These venerable sisters with poor and shabby clothes, who so kindly busied themselves with the poor wretched orphans given to their custody to be raised.... Those poor inmates each one of whom seemed to present to you a special case for compassion.... The way that nothing superfluous could be found throughout the House, and at the same time, nothing strictly necessary was lacking... The sight of how nothing was wasted, and everything utilized, and some benefit reaped from everything.... That special sight too, of so many poor human beings, suffering in various ways who found themselves surrounded by loving care and heartfelt assistance there, while in the family home, a life, alas too painful would have dragged on, without a comfort...; all these aspects of the Little House of divine Providence in Como impressed me so favorably, and my heart was so

¹⁴⁵ Witness of Sr. G. Papis, *AG Super Virtutibus*, *op. cit.*, p. 316.

moved that entering it indifferent, I left full of admiration and enthusiasm".¹⁴⁶

In May that same year 1894, we glean similar emotions from Fr. Guanella's words when he speaks of the Little House on the first anniversary of the building of the Church of the Sacred Heart.

"They join the little hands of innocent infants in prayer, they fill forsaken young people and abandoned children with zeal.

Here persons consecrated to God offer themselves as victims of expiation for their own faults and for the grave needs of souls.

Here, the ministers of the Lord from the holy Altar, offer the eternal Father the supreme Sacrifice of the Martyr of Martyrs, Jesus, Savior of the human race.

The old with one foot already in the grave cling to that altar to participate in the Bread of the strong, the viaticum of eternity, and join in the common prayer with their groans.

Praised be the Lord who from eternity has chosen this place that it be sanctified".¹⁴⁷

2.4 "Faithful companions"

With regard to the sisters of these glorious beginnings in Como, an unedited manuscript has been preserved in the Founder's handwriting.¹⁴⁸ It consists of

¹⁴⁶ L. Santini, *Una visita*, in «La Provvidenza», July 1894, p. 163.

¹⁴⁷ L. GUANELLA, *Il primo anniversario della consacrazione della chiesa del Sacro Cuore*, in «La Provvidenza», May 1894, p. 149.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. L. GUANELLA, *Fedeli compagne*, manuscript, AFSMP, Rome.

16 pages of very hasty and almost illegible notes on four sisters and other persons who died precisely during the first stages of the Little House. They all left the memory of heroic virtues.

I have transcribed just a few features of Guanella's text, concerning his four sisters.¹⁴⁹

OMBELLINA CALVI (1866-1887)

“Ombellina worked for three months in the silk mills with Giovanna. She worked and prayed. Ombellina was made by Sr. Clare. Those who knew her held her in esteem”.

MARIA ANGELA TARABINI (d. 1889)

“She made her profession on Holy Thursday 1888 and died on March 17, 1889. She entered Pianello on the Tuesday of Holy Week in 1886: she arrived in a boat with goats and two little orphan girls. She would sew until midnight and get up numb with cold, without warming herself during the night. She was diligent and worked for the house. She would spend as many as 11 or 12 hours praying, in bed. She prayed at all hours. She lost weight and concealed this. She did not complain during her illness. She still continued to work. She made a vow for the house. She would add water to her bread soup, to eat it faster. She always played the clown, without offending anyone and was always in a hurry. She gave a lovely welcome to anyone who visited her, but spoke little. She enjoyed the sweetness of prayer. ‘Sr. Clare taught me this

¹⁴⁹ For the dates of birth and death, cf. *Con Maria verso la Casa del Padre, Profili delle consorelle defunte*, Vol I, Rome, Centro Stampa Figlie di S. Maria della Provvidenza, 1988.

and that'. She saw Sr. Clare and Ombellina dressed in white”.

MADDALENA GRANZELLA (1860-1889)

“She made her profession on Holy Thursday 1888 and died on September 26, 1889. She worked at the Magni silk mill for three months. She worked, was silent and prayed. She had a lot of trouble with the mentally sick woman, Eugenia, but never complained. She said that it had all been offered up for the Little House. That evening she was very cheerful. She longed for Heaven. She became a worshiper and seldom gave up. She was pained by the faults of the House. She encouraged Giovanna in her tasks. She would speak if she had breath. Speaking of good things revived her”.

ASSUNTA GRANZELLA (1860-1889)

“She died at the age of 28, on December 25, 1889. At the age of 20 she resolved to do good. The curate advised her and she was grateful. She was clothed as a Daughter of Mary and was happy. By nature she was frank and open; she was fond of her father. She was the beast of burden of the house and of the village. She was a simple soul”.

2.5 *The formative and legislative texts of the period 1886-1899*

There are many formative and legislative texts from this period. We briefly present the first two which (especially the second) have a dense spiritual-ascetic content, but virtually ignore the institute's juridical formation.

The first: *Regolamento per L'Istituto di Serve Povere in Como*, 1886, (Rule for the Institute of Poor Servants in

Como).¹⁵⁰ In this text the religious are almost always called “foundresses”, as compared to the poor servants who are the teachers. They are also called “the daughters of the retreat of Pianello Lario”. “The goal of this institution is to perfect the foundresses in the exercise of charity, to improve the morals of the classes entrusted to their care and to educate and raise good servants for the benefit of ordinary families”. The brief text has important pedagogical annotations.

The second: *Massime di spirito e metodo di azione*, 1888-1889 (spiritual maxims and method of action).¹⁵¹ The text presents to us one of the most beautiful summaries of the authentic Guanellian spirit. It consists of notes for lectures given to the sisters, some of which have been developed. Fr. Guanella is aware that the basis for his works was being laid in those years, and he warns the sisters:

“The members of the Little House and especially the religious ... must reflect that the present persons are the foundresses of the Little House of Providence. How deep the foundations of faith and humility must be, to build a solid house!”.

Apostolic charity, already seen in the *Fondamento* is still the ideal proposed. It is the ideal of holiness reached through the total gift of self. It is symptomatic that the first chapter is entitled: “Effort”. By this full-time gift of themselves, the sisters were to experience an authentic “mysticism of service”.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. L. GUANELLA, *Scritti per le Congregazioni...*, op. cit., p. 5ff.

¹⁵¹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 15ff.

Fr. Guanella insisted on how the sisters were to live their daily life. The text is characterized by the total absence of formal-legislative concerns. There is in it a maximum spiritual commitment with a minimum of structures. Their *aim* is apostolic life; to be the “salt of the earth”; to sanctify themselves in the special care of the “wretched”. Those who had “gathered together” were to be united by the bond of charity and live together like the Holy Family. *Governance* is imposed on the analogy of the family. The *Activities*: first of all adoration; then the little orphan girls, the elderly women, the deaf-mutes, the home for disabled priests, the printing press, the community prayer hall, the care of the mentally handicapped. For the first time mention appears of this kind of assistance: “special care for those persons who need it since they are less able and wretchedly poor”. The chapters: “The Spirit of the Little House; “The Spirit of Providence”; “Cheerfulness” are really lovely. They concern topics typical of the Guanellian spirit.

Let us now move on to the texts written between 1892 and 1899. I shall only examine the texts dedicated to the sisters:

- *Statuto delle Vittime del Divino Amore* 1893, VDA (Statutes of the Victims of Divine Love)¹⁵²
- *Breve statuto delle Figlie del Sacro Cuore, chiamate Crocine in Como* 1893, BSC (Brief Statutes of the Daughters of the Sacred Heart, known as “Crocine” in Como)¹⁵³

¹⁵² Cf. L. GUANELLA, *Scritti per le Congregazioni...*, *op. cit.*, p. 56ff.

¹⁵³ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 79ff.

- *Statuto organico delle Figlie della Provvidenza*, 1894, SOFP (Directory of the Daughters of Providence)¹⁵⁴
- *Statuto della Figlie di Santa Maria della Provvidenza*, 1896, SFSMP (Statutes of the Daughters of St. Mary of Providence).¹⁵⁵
- *Norme principali per un Regolamento interno della Piccola Casa della Divina Provvidenza*, 1894, RPC (Principal Norms for an Internal Rule of the Little House of Divine Providence).¹⁵⁶

This text is dedicated to both the branches of the Little House, we shall examine it with regard to the female branch.

We shall make an overall analysis of these texts, aiming only to shed light on the way the Congregation gradually took shape, starting with a brief consideration of the *name* given to the sisters in the various texts.

a) *The sisters' name*

The definitive title of the “Daughters of Sr. Mary of Providence” was to appear only after 1896. Before this period, Fr. Guanella would continue to call his religious by different names, the sign of a continuous quest for identity and a gradual configuration of the structures to the ideals he cherished in his heart.

The following is an outline of the various names he used, in chronological order:

¹⁵⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 161ff.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 181ff.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 109ff.

- 1892-93: *Victims of Divine Love*, later corrected to *Daughters of the Sacred Heart in VDA*.
- 1893: *Zealots of the Sacred Heart*, in an early draft of the BSC.
- *Daughters of the Sacred Heart* in a second draft of the BSC and he then added called “*Crocine*” in Como. But in another notebook they are said to be *Daughters of the Sacred Heart called Apostles in Como*.
- 1894: *Daughters of Providence*, in SOFP.
- 1896 *Daughters of St. Mary of Providence*, in SFSMP.

When a study of the Founder’s spirituality is undertaken, perhaps it will be possible to understand better what each of these names meant to him. For the time being we can limit ourselves to noting that each certainly represented a stage in the way the Congregation gradually took shape; their name was subsequently to change, but the meaning it has in the Founder’s original plan must be explained and preserved as a valuable element, characteristic of our identity. Each one of these names therefore contains a “spark” of the charism which merits reflection.

We note that in all the names prior to 1894, an emphasis on the Heart of Jesus and the mystery of the Cross prevails (victims, “crocine”) This is the spirituality of our participation in Christ’s redemptive offering for the world’s salvation.

In 1894 the concept of Providence, fundamental in our spirituality, also appears in the name. In this period the sisters are “daughters”. The filial sense prevails over the sacrificial. The definitive name was to be: *Daughters of St. Mary of Providence (DSMP)*. In this name we find included the most typical concepts of Guanellian spirituality: the sense of divine sonship (“Daughters”)

and the accent on Providence: the whole name is seen through the perspective of Mary's motherly mediation. In the name there is an allusion to the mystery of motherhood which, like Mary, the sisters must be able to incarnate.

Since 1896 the name has remained unchanged, a sign that the Founder had now reached a certain definitive clarity with regard to his sisters' features.

I like to recall that precisely in the period 1892-94, when Guanellian spirituality placed such an accent on the contemplation and imitation of the Heart of Christ, the future Mother Clelia Merloni¹⁵⁷ was a novice in the Little House for two years. Precisely in the context of Guanellian spirituality she had remarkable mystical experiences associated with the Heart of Christ, so that a decision matured in her to give life to a congregation that would be totally dedicated to the Heart of Christ. She left our Congregation on March 4, 1894, and on May 30 that same year, founded the Congregation of the Apostles of the Sacred Heart.¹⁵⁸

b) *The gradual configuration of the Congregation*

The reflection now broadens to cover several general topics such as: the nature of the members, the aims, the means of prayer and action, governance.

¹⁵⁷ One reads in the *Registro generale della Piccola Casa*: "Merloni Clelia, entered August 14, 1892; left March 4, 1894", AFSMP, Rome.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. A. DE FARIAS, *Clelia Merloni, madre e maestra*, Thesis ad doctoratum n. 94, Pontificium Athenaeum Antonianum, 1988, pp. 8-9.

The nature of the members

“The daughters ... are religious bound together by the *bond of chastity* and by that of the *annual vows* of poverty, chastity and obedience. They likewise oblige themselves to *care for the contagious sick*, with the superior’s consent (VDA, 1892-93).

“The fourth vow of assistance to the contagious sick, is a good resolution rather than a vow” (RPC 1894). “Moreover the *vows* are simple and *are renewed from year to year*” (RPC 1894).

“The vows are *simple* and *temporary* for the first three years; they are *perpetual* after the first three years” (SFSMP 1896).

There are two constants in these texts, with regard to the nature of the members. First of all, the Founder’s clear intention to consider the “bond of charity” fundamental and distinctive to the extent that he always places it before the bond of the vows. In the earlier text, *Massime di spirito e metodo di azione*, the only bond mentioned is that of charity; although the vows were certainly lived, they do not appear explicitly in the text. However, it can be noticed that as the Founder’s concern to obtain juridical approval gradually increases, there is a corresponding increase in the appearance of *standardizing elements*, proper to the common concept of religious life, and his own more original characteristics become fewer.

Another constantly recurring concept is that of “*assistance to the contagious sick*”. This commitment of heroic charity is sometimes seen as a fourth vow and sometimes, instead, it is a promise or a good resolution. As our history developed, this element was unfortunately lost. Cugnasca himself notes on this subject: “The

Servant of God had added a special promise that they would sacrifice themselves in assistance to the contagious sick: I do not know why this promise was later removed”.¹⁵⁹ It is certain that the impact of our first sisters on the public opinion of the time, because of their life of absolute poverty and sacrifice and the heroism of their charity (their courageous assistance in the case of epidemics or public disasters), was such that it inspired many vocations and a chorus of admiration and sympathy on all sides.

The *Vows* are annual, common and simple. Until 1896 no distinction is made between annual and perpetual vows. The concept of annual vows for a three-year period which then became perpetual emerges in SFSMP. In fact, we read in a document of 1907: “There are 448 sisters, 348 of whom have made their perpetual vows (until now there have been no temporary vows, but there will be in the future, as has been established in the Constitutions)”.¹⁶⁰

Aims

“The Victims of Divine Love propose for themselves *perpetual adoration together with the exercise of charitable works*”. (VDA 1892-93).

“*The Daughters of the Little House gather to sanctify themselves in the love of God and neighbor*” (BSC 1893).

¹⁵⁹ M. CUGNASCA, *Fr. Guanella «uomo straordinario...»*, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

¹⁶⁰ C. BENEDETTI, *Relazione alla S. Congregazione dei Religiosi*, Rome, July 18, 1907, AFSMP, Rome.

“They must painstakingly seek to fulfill the *twofold aim* for which the Congregation was established: *their own salvation and the salvation of their neighbor*” (SOF 11894).

“The purpose ... *in the imitation of Cottolengo*, to go to the aid of the greatest possible number of every age, class and sex, *according to the help and directions of Providence*” (RPC 1894).

As we see, the twofold aim of their own and their neighbor’s salvation recurs in accordance with the proper canons of religious life. However we must note that the “adoration” in VDA and the “all works of charity” in SFSMP are so important that they pass from the role of means to that of aims.

The most original description of the aim is the one we find in RPC. It contains the most typical elements of the Guanellian vocation: the imitation of Cottolengo; going to the aid of the greatest possible number of the needy; the spirit of Providence.

Means of prayer

“*Perpetual adoration* takes place day and night” (VDA 1892-93).

“*Meditation ... Holy Mass*. Several visits throughout the day to the Blessed Sacrament, the Way of the Cross, the holy Rosary ... the spirit of prayer and real *continuous prayer* ... is suggested as far as possible, and *perpetual adoration* by taking turns.” (BSC 1893).

“The most fervent and the strongest, at least a few times a week, should also apply themselves to *night adoration*” (RPC 1894).

“Each daughter, every day and *for the duration of an hour*, is obliged to adore the Blessed Sacrament and must

ensure, by being replaced or by replacing a sister of hers, that this adoration is continued during every hour of day or night” (SFSMP 1896).

These practices of piety are proper to Christian and religious life. We note as regards meditation that in BSC it was to last for at least an hour “every morning from 5.00 a.m. to 6.00 a.m.”; in RPC, “the novices take part in meditation every day for about three quarters of an hour”. The *Way of the Cross* is ever present; there is an insistence on continuous prayer, by means of ejaculations and good thoughts, and on silence.

There a particular insistence on *adoration*. It appears in all the documents and it is such an important means that in VDA it is put as the principal aim. The Founder’s ideal was that there should be *perpetual adoration* in the house. He therefore insists that at least the strongest and the most fervent should lead the way in night adoration. In 1896, with great good sense, he affirms the obligation of every religious to spend at least one hour in adoration every day, and says that if this were done by taking turns it would result in continuous adoration at every hour of the day and the night.

Let us not forget that in *Massime di spirito e metodo di azione*, adoration was considered the principal “activity” of the Little House. Moreover, we are very familiar with the spirit of adoration and the night adoration of Sr. Clare, Sr. Marcellina Sr. Maddalena Granzella and all the original sisters.

Means of action

The charitable activities of the Little House consisted of: *taking in little orphan girls, students* who aspired to gaining elementary certificates and the

perfect knowledge of the feminine skills; abandoned handicapped girls and deaf-mutes; single women, boarders or widows, who desired to live *more religiosarum*; the care of *invalids in the Little House and of the sick, especially the poor at home; the training of girls in domestic service and their placement*. The same kind of activities with regard to the male sex. In addition: *supervising prayer services on feast days, children's catechism in the parishes; printing presses and book-binding; spinning; dress-making, cooking, etc....*

No charitable activity fails to appear on Guanella's horizons. On the contrary, what the ecclesiastical authorities attempted to make Guanella understand was the need to somewhat limit his field of action. Fr. Aloysius was to find this proposal very hard to accept.

Typical activities in this period were assistance to the sick at home, the domestic service of novices and sisters with the well-off families in the town, the commitment of some of the sisters to work in the silk mills, either to increase their source of income, or to "moralize the world of work" by caring for the workers. Perhaps the latter commitment did not last long, but it is indicative of a line of activity which is not alien to our origins. We also note the sisters' involvement in activities not generally entrusted to women, such as printing and book-binding.

This cursory view of the activities undertaken by the Congregation in its early years clearly demonstrates that Guanellian houses at that time were never closed in on themselves. Instead, they were centers radiating charity and a multiple and effective apostolate at all levels (see also the importance Guanella gave to the quality of printing!). They were centers open to all the needs of the locality.

Governance

“The superiors are a general assistant in the living person of the co-foundress, with Fr. Coppini, the parish priest, Sr. Marcellina Bosatta and with the election of another chosen from among the Victims of Divine Love by a majority vote of the religious...” (VDA 11892-93).

“Another superior is to be a priest, trained as far as possible by the Little House, preferred by a majority vote of the religious and approved by the diocesan Bishop.... The priest Luigi Guanella, founder with Sr. Marcellina Bosatta, is also confirmed as general chaplain for life.... Six of the older religious constitute the Chapter.... Each individual house has a chaplain” (VDA 1892-93).

“The Little House is directed by a Superior Council or Chapter. The Superior Council or Chapter is composed of a priest director, a sister general directress, another sister vice directress, the novice mistress and two other sisters with the title of Counselor” (RPC 1894).

Wishing to make some final reflections on the way in which *Governance* was considered in the mentality, writings and above all in practice during the Founder's years, we can see that it started from the minimum, virtually without a structure (as it was in the period of the *Massime di spirito e metodo di azione*, which merely states that “the governance of the house is a family governance”), to the point of a constant increase in the structures and attributions of governance. This increase of norms was yet again due to the requirements of ecclesiastical legislation; if we want to retain the Founder's original ideas without denying the value of structures as necessary for orderly progress, we must increasingly underscore the fact that governance for us must be “a family governance”.

However, this characteristic was subsequently to fall prey to the demands of canon law and of the common management of governance between the male and female branches. The Founder himself, in a chapter of the RPC entitled “*Rapporti fra i compartimenti dei due sessi nella Piccola Casa*”, gives the basic reasons which motivated him to keep this unusual form of management.

“In this respect a relationship of faith and religion exists and nothing else. In outlining this relationship of faith and religion it should be noted: 1) that the proximity of the two sexes is intended to serve as a *mutual help*, just as it has seemed useful to founders in general to create a religious family of both sexes *since it is in imitation of this same apostolic custom*. 2) Consequently the *working relationship must be that of brothers and sisters*, in the practice of faith and Christian charity”.

The Founders thoughts on this problem reappeared very clearly in 1907:

“Through lack of experience, he (Fr. Guanella) did not create that perfect separation between these two congregations required by the Sacred Congregation today, but considered them as two branches of a single Institute with the same goal, under the same direction, without separation of goods and lending one another a hand to fulfill the same purpose”.¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ C. BENEDETTI, *Relazione alla S. Congregazione...*, *op. cit.*

APPENDIX

Table 1

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE THE PERIOD OF PIANELLO AND THE EXPANSION TO COMO

- 1827 - October 7: Carlo Coppini is born in Domaso.
- 1852 - June 5: Coppini is ordained a priest.
- 1862 - May 26: Fr. Coppini is canonically invested with the benefice of the parish of Pianello.
 - 1st Sunday of July: he arrives in Pianello.
- 1865 - Fr. Coppini establishes a holiday school for girls. Marcellina Bosatta collaborates with him.
- 1870 - In 1870 or 1871, Fr. Guanella and Fr. Coppini meet by chance on a ferry boat.
- 1871 - July 1: decree of erection of the Pious Union of the DMI.
 - October 15: Fr. Coppini establishes the Pious Union of the DMI in Pianello. The first aspirants join it.
- 1872 - April 14: Marcellina Bosatta is elected superior of the DMI.
 - October: profession of the first five DMI.
 - In October, Marcellina Bosatta spends a fortnight at Fr. Bonoli's Institute of Poor Single Women in Como.
 - October 18: Marcellina Bosatta and Maddalena Minatta begin to live *more religiosarum* in Camlago.

- 1873 - June 5: canonical erection of the Hospice.
- 1874 - Two of Rosaz's sisters direct the life of the Camlago community.
- 1877 - In July, Dina Bosatta leaves the novitiate of the Canossians and enters the Hospice of Camlago.
- 1878 - June 28, Feast of the Sacred Heart, the first religious profession of the first four religious: Marcellina Bosatta, Clare Bosatta, Rosa Minatta, Giacinta Minatta.
- August 27: the Stations of the Cross are set up in the chapel of Camlago.
- 1880 - July 10: Fr. Coppini drafts the Rule for the Ursulines of the Hospice.
- 1881 - July 1: Fr. Coppini dies.
- After Coppini's death Candida Morelli makes her religious profession.
 - The first half of November: Fr. Aloysius Guanella arrives in Pianello.
- 1882 - Sr. Marcellina "entrusts herself".
- 1883 - March 19: Fr. Guanella signs a memorandum for the purchase of the Perpenti vineyard, with the intention of giving it to the Hospice. L. Guanella and M. Bosatta sign it.
- 1884 - The religious of the Hospice offer to go to the aid of the cholera victims in Naples.
- September 19: Fr. Guanella requests authorization for the celebration and adoration of the Eucharist in the private chapel of the Hospice
- 1885 - Fr. Guanella dedicates the *Fondamento* to the Ursulines of the Hospice.
- March 19: Fr. Guanella presents a program-report for the development of the Hospice to the Bishop, Msgr. Carsana. Sr. Marcellina, in her capacity, also signs it.

- 1886 - February 25: Fr. Guanella and Sr. Marcellina take the first steps to purchase a plot of land in T. Grossi Street, Como.
- April 5: The first expedition from Pianello leaves by boat; some orphan girls with two aspirants (one of whom is Maria Mambretti) and the novice, Martina Silvetti.
 - April 6: Fr. Guanella and Sr. Marcellina receive the group in Como.
 - May 12-13: the second expedition (with Sr. Clare).
 - July 29: purchase of the elements of the first house in T. Grossi Street. The contract is signed by: Fr. Guanella, Sr. Marcellina and Sr. Clare Bosatta.
 - August 21: Ombellina Calvi makes her profession in Como.
 - November: Sr. Clare falls ill.
 - December 13: Sr. Clare returns to Pianello.
- 1887 - April 20: Sr. Clare dies in Pianello.
- Martina Silvetti makes her profession on the Feast of the Sacred Heart
 - November 30: Sr. Ombellina Calvi dies.

THE CONGREGATION
GRADUALLY TAKES SHAPE

- The Pious Union of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate (DMI) 1871 - LAY ASSOCIATION; without a habit or community life. Profession which included: "the resolution of perfect chastity; the spirit of poverty and obedience".
- Camlago 1872-78 - MORE RELIGIOSARUM; community life: "The method outlined for the Daughters of St. Angela was followed in the community".
- Camlago 1878 - RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY; under the jurisdiction of the Ordinary; habit. "Religious vows are not required; the firm resolution of virginity, the sincere will to obey and the spirit of poverty suffice".
- The Little House 1886-88 - SOCIETY OF COMMUNITY LIFE: a "company of persons"; "a bond of charity": "...let all be as one ... like grains of wheat, ground, mixed and kneaded, so that a single loaf is then offered...".

- Victims of Divine Love 1889-90 - RELIGIOUS CONGREGATION: “Religious bound by the bond of charity and of the ANNUAL VOWS of poverty, chastity and obedience”.
- “Crocine” 1893 - RELIGIOUS CONGREGATION: “The daughters gathered in this way, remain especially bound by the bond of charity and at the same time by that of the three VOWS.
- Rule 1894 - RELIGIOUS CONGREGATION: “there are four vows: poverty, chastity, obedience and assistance to the contagious sick.... The vows are simple and rescindable at will by the Superior General; they are renewed from year to year”.
- Statutes of the Daughters of Providence 1894 - RELIGIOUS CONGREGATION: “The daughters will take simple vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. The simple vows are annual... After six years they can also bind themselves by perpetual vows”.
- Statutes of the Daughters of St. Mary of Providence 1896 - RELIGIOUS CONGREGATION: “The Daughters of St. Mary of Providence are bound to one another by a special bond of charity and by the religious vows of poverty, chastity and obedience”. “The vows are simple and temporary during the first three years, and perpetual after the first three years”.

- Statutes of the Daughters of St. Mary of Providence 1898 - RELIGIOUS CONGREGATION: “The bonds of union are two 1) love of God; 2) love of neighbor in the practice of the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience”.
- Directory of the Daughters of St. Mary of Providence 1899 - RELIGIOUS CONGREGATION: “The Congregation of the Daughters of Providence consists of daughters ... who ... pool their resources and live under the guidance of legitimate superiors, with the safeguard of simple religious vows”.
- Constitutions of the union: Daughters of Providence 1899 - RELIGIOUS CONGREGATION: “Concerning the bonds of these are three: the vow of poverty, charity and obedience.

Table 3

SOME CONSTANTS

CONTINUOUS ADORATION, DAILY OR PERPETUAL

- 1888 - “Two Sisters, Sr. Giovanna Granzella and Sr. Maria Buzzetti are assigned for adoration and for the organization of their companions. Great good can come to the house by properly arranging daily adoration” (*Massime e metodo*).
- 1889-90 - “Perpetual adoration is by day and night”. “The Victims of Divine Love dedicate themselves to adoration together with the practice of charitable actions” (VDA).
- 1893 - “Suggestions are made as to how it is possible to achieve perpetual adoration by taking turns” (BSC).
- 1894 - “They take turns for the hours of adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.... The most fervent and the strongest should also devote themselves to night adoration” (RPC).
- 1896 - “The adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is obligatory for each daughter every day for the duration of an hour, and she must ensure, by

replacing or by being replaced by one of her sisters, that this adoration is continued every hour of the day and ... of the night” (SFSMP).

- 1899 - “Every day, for one hour, either during the day or at night, each sister adores the Blessed Sacrament; this pious exercise is not neglected by anyone, because it is the synthesis of the strength and fruits of religious life” (CFSMP).

ASSISTANCE TO THE CONTAGIOUS SICK

- 1881 - “Everyone will be prepared to ... assist the sick ... even in the case an epidemic” (Coppini’s Rule).
- 1884 - The Ursulines offer to help those sick with cholera in Naples.
- 1885 - “The Founder’s opinion was that they should likewise dedicate themselves to the care of the sick during epidemics or the risk of contagion” (Program-Report, March 19, 1885).
- 1889-90 - The daughters must also care for the contagious sick” (VDA).
- 1893 - The daughters, with the superior’s consent, are also obliged to assist the sick in the case of an epidemic” (BSC).
- 1894 - There are four vows: “poverty, chastity, obedience and assistance to the sick with contagious diseases. The fourth vow, rather than a vow is a good resolution” (RPC).

- 1896 - “The Daughters of Sr. Mary of Providence are bound by a special bond of charity and religious vows of poverty, chastity, obedience and public assistance to the contagious sick” (SFSMP).

ASSISTANCE TO THE SICK AT HOME

- 1881 - “Each will be ready to ... assist the sick, especially if abandoned, both at home and in the hospitals” (Coppini’s Rule).
- 1889-90 - “The work of St. John of God cares for invalids in the Little House and for the sick, especially the poor, in their homes” (VDA).
- 1893 - “To serve the sick in their homes is only an exceptional and additional office of the ‘Crocine’” (BSC).
- 1899 - “The Daughters of St. Mary of Providence are concerned with the care of the sick in the house and also in their homes” (SFSMP).
- 1899 - “A team of sisters and trustworthy persons should be kept on hand for the care of the sick at home” (RFSMP).

DIRECTION OF SUNDAY SCHOOLS

- 1881-85 - “Among the teachers, some ... attend to the offices ... of Sunday school” (Program-Report 1885).
- 1888-89 - “Preparations must be made for the Sunday school during the week, and it must be lived

out, instructing patiently, powerfully, lovingly, as did the Apostles at Pentecost” (*Massime e Metodo*).

1889-90 - “The Victims of Divine Love also do all they can in directing the prayers and lessons on Sundays...” (SFDP).

1894 - ”In every case, on festive days, a festive oratory will be opened...” (SFDP).

1899 - “The Daughters of St. Mary of Providence are especially involved ... in the direction of Sunday schools” (SFSMP).

“SPECIFIC” ACTIVITIES IN THIS PERIOD (which were not continued by the Congregation)

Printing press and bookbinding (*Massime e Metodo*, p. 39; BSC, p. 96; RPC, p. 139).

Assistance to servants and domestic service (*Regolamento per l'Istituto delle Serve Povere*, p. 8ff; (*Massime e Metodo*, p. 52; VDA, p. 60; BSC, p. 99; RPC, p. 133; RFSMP, 1899, p. 312).

External work and assistance at the silk mills (BSC, p. 97; RFSMP, 1899, p. 303).

Table 4

Professions and deaths between 1878 and 1899

Key:

□ = Professions ■ = Deaths

