

**A selection from**  
**THE ASCETICAL LETTERS**  
**OF**  
**ANTONIO ROSMINI**

**Volume I**

**1815-1831**

Translated and edited  
by John Morris Inst. Ch.

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## TRANSLATOR'S FOREWORD

The edition of the Ascetical Letters used was that of 1912 (Rome, *Tipografia del Senato*).

The four volumes of the *Epistolario Ascetico* are themselves made up of a selection from the *Epistolario Completo*, and what may appear to be a complete letter is often in fact a selected section only.

In this edition I have drawn on only about half the letters written before the end of December 1831. This was chiefly because Rosmini often covers much the same ground when writing to several correspondents. In addition I have sometimes made cuts (usually shown by an ellipsis mark [...]) where there was rhetorical elaboration. Occasionally I have inserted a few words in square brackets to ease the flow of the sense.

I have not attempted to produce an accurate word-by-word translation of the original. Rather, I have most of the time tried to use the sort of phrasing and language which Rosmini might have used had he been writing in English today. (There are limits to how far this can be done if the sense of the original is to be kept, so it is a matter of compromise.) I have also toned down some of the more florid expressions which were customary in 19th century Italian, particularly in ecclesiastical circles - for instance a letter to a cardinal might end with some such phrase as, 'kissing the sacred purple, I remain your most humble, most devoted and most obsequious servant...' and these things I have omitted or curtailed.

Rosmini is at times repetitive and wordy; but on the whole I did not feel justified in 'tidying up' his characteristic way of writing (apart from the cuts mentioned above).

Finally, I should like to express my thanks to Fr Bernard Collins for his help over some points of translation - though he cannot be held responsible for any errors on my part!



## PREFACE

In making this selection - which covers only letters written up to the end of December 1831 - I have included one or two very early ones, to give some idea of the way Rosmini's ideas and ideals were formed very early in his life. Many of the later letters are very long, and there is some overlap; but I have included them because they enable us to see how his special vocation gradually became clearer to him, and how he tried to impress the basic principles of his spiritual outlook on the men who were attracted to his charism, and whose outlook he patiently formed - Loewenbruck and Gentili especially.

Broadly speaking, the letters in this volume have three aspects: they show the early stages of the Institute of Charity and the call to work in England; they reveal a great deal about the ascetical principles which informed Rosmini's life and guided his actions; and finally they shed light on the sort of man he was.

A collection like this is hardly suited for reading from cover to cover, and some readers may find the long letters daunting. But Rosmini's natural stride is a long one, and he does not lend himself to furnishing 'highlights', concentrated gobbets of spirituality. There *are* quite often striking short sentences: 'haste comes from the devil'; *age quod agis* - get on with what you are doing; 'death may take us out of life at any moment'; 'Blessed are those who pray'; 'We have no rule which calls for a strong stomach!'; '[We are] a society in which nothing is regarded as more important than kindness to one another'. And there are many more. But Rosmini's mind is more often seen in great sweeps of thought - as in the vision in which he suggests how the whole of human society may be gathered into the one Church of Christ (d. Letters 20, 92). And another important result of reading his ascetical letters *in extenso* is that we see how his key themes, such as abandonment to divine Providence, the Church, indifference, humility, prudence and so on form an integrated theological whole - which of course is summed up in the *Maxims of Christian Perfection*.

At any rate, I hope that those who read these letters will find themselves stimulated to that 'hunger and thirst for holiness' which possessed Antonio Rosmini.

J.F.M.

## 1. To Don Pietro Orsi<sup>1</sup> at Rovereto

Rovereto, 28 September 1815

My dear friend,

I think more highly of a single drop of morality and religion than of a whole ocean of human teaching... Yesterday Padre Cesari came to see me; and also with us for quite a while was the painter Udine, who had come from Florence to visit his family. He spoke at length, and he has good insights about art. It is said that he is one of the finest painters of the day, and this high repute gives me pleasure, because he is a fellow-citizen.

Oh, if I could live two or three hundred lives, I would gladly give one of them to painting! Art delights me greatly, and I can see myself as a Raphael! When I think of his pictures I am enraptured... his composition, the faces of his madonnas, of Jesus, of the angels and saints, the way he arranges his figures ... But this fervour of mine will soon cool, and all to the good. Here we are: scarcely are we born, and death comes: we can do so little. *With so little time at our disposal, it is foolish to learn about vanities.* Would that, instead of dabbling in vanities, I could do one thing only — labour to become dear to God, to walk always under his eye and to trust serenely. And if only I could be of service to my fellow-men... the very idea delights me.

My dear Don Pietro, pray for me to God (without whom we can do nothing) so that my wishes may become wholehearted and come to fruition. For this my heart greatly longs. I am always glad to exert myself in this way, and I make no account of the labour; so apart from this great goal of mine, the most beautiful and sublime teachings of all the arts and sciences seem to me merely harsh, oppressive, without savour...

I embrace you and assure you of my true friendship.

Yours,

Antonio Rosmini

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<sup>1</sup> Don Pietro Orsi was a priest of Rovereto and the brother of Don Paolo. Both were very dear friends of Rosmini, and both taught in the school of his hometown.

## 2. To Don Luigi Sonn

Padua, 1817

... You give me very consoling news about yourself. I am pleased if for our part we are doing all that we can and ought to do; but after that, let us not set our hearts on the result. If what we hope for comes about, let us praise God for it; if it does not, let us praise him equally. I say this simply to recommend firmness of mind, which is always worth preserving. For the rest, I am glad of it, and I see that you are well prepared for it ... As for the house of the Salesians; I still have my heart set on it. I can tell you that I have some excellent friends who would fly in haste to Rovereto like birds to their nest. But a place is lacking. If only there could be a house of priests living a common life, what a fine thing that would be! As you know, this is what St Augustine wanted to see; and anyone who has at heart virtue and friendship — well, I believe he could do no other than conceive such a beautiful desire<sup>2</sup>. Studying peacefully together, united in prayer, souls closely united one to another — what more could anyone wish for? Christ in our midst, all of us one in Christ. What things we should accomplish together! A bookshop, a printing house, plans for works which I have always before my mind, and over which I labour more than you can imagine. Let us keep this idea always in mind, even though for a while we may have to keep quiet about it...

Goodbye, my dear friend, goodbye.

---

<sup>2</sup> These were the thoughts of Rosmini at the age of twenty, while he was still a university student. Eleven years later he founded the Institute of Charity, and so realized the vision he had cherished as a young man.

### 3. To the Marchesa di Canossa

Rovereto, 10 March 1822

Dear Marchesa,

It is very pleasing to see how the Lord is gently arranging everything. The various circumstances you tell me about convince me more and more that it is the will of God that the plan should succeed, and that it should develop little by little — and so the more surely and steadily. You say that you need me, and I will most willingly help in any way I can ... my present way of life (and the many cares which distract me and over which God knows what a strict account I must render) means that I am without helpers, and I am, so to speak, alone in the midst of men. It follows that I am unable to deal effectively with some matters by contacting persons of importance. If I were on familiar terms with them, or at least known to them, this would be an advantage, and would enable me to put forward ideas that I might consider useful — with some hope of producing fruit as a result. All the same, I simply want you to tell me what you would like me to do, so that I may faithfully carry it out as far as I am able. [He goes on to say that if the Marchesa is in need of funds to help in the care of poor children, he will contribute what he can.] ... May God prosper a scheme which is so beneficial and necessary in these days! There is a great need of people who are full of the spirit of charity, for we are very imperfect, and if we are not actually cold, there is at any rate a great deal of tepidity. It would be a great help if, say, Christian doctrine could be taught to the young in a better, a more lively and methodical way.

The spirit which you manifest in the seven Commemorations of the Precious Blood shed by our Lord (and in the Reflections on these) gives eloquent evidence of the love which the Brothers of Charity are dedicated to professing — the same love which Jesus Christ showed, even to the shedding of his blood: the same love which caused St Paul to say that he was crucified to the world and the world to him. This is the model on which the Brothers of Charity must be formed, since they propose to spend themselves in works of charity for the benefit of others...

Remember me always before the Lord and our Lady. With great respect I sign myself your humble servant,

A. R. p.

#### 4. To the Marchesa Maddalena di Canossa at Verona

Rovereto, 20 January 1824

Dear Marchesa,

As regards that expression, or rather that thought, that I put in my last letter concerning the outward form of devotion, I simply meant that it would greatly please me if a congregation of good people dedicated to our Lord (such as the Brothers of Charity would be) were to conform themselves as much as possible to the public practices of Holy Church. Let me explain myself better. The Church has committed her prayers and devotions to various books — particularly the Missal, the Breviary and the Martyrology. In these books is contained an infinite treasury of sound sentiments of piety and the most tender affections. But for most people these have become almost too sublime and difficult I think the reasons for this are, first, that Latin has fallen into disuse; second, that Christians are poorly educated, and so nowadays they can only with difficulty savour certain ideas which are pithy but serious and weighty; and lastly, they listen to the singing of the chant in church for enjoyment, instead of entering into the thoughts it expresses. Now it would seem to me a most useful thing if a society of persons who can attend to God were to occupy themselves in carrying out well (and taking part well in) these fruitful and holy practices of the Church. To make these thoughts more specific, let us consider how many defects there are among Christians simply in the way they assist at Mass. And why is this? For the most part it is because they have not been sufficiently well instructed: they know little about the mystery of the Holy Sacrifice or the pattern of this whole great ceremony; and they do not understand the words the priest uses. Nearly all that he says is in the plural — that is, in union with the people present — supposing (since this is the Church's intention) that all of them do not simply understand but actually join in these sentiments; and finally, the people are ignorant of the significance of the vestments, the sacred vessels and the rites which are part of the Mass. Yet how much more fruitful must be a Mass which is heard when all these things are understood; how much more intimate a union will emerge between Jesus Christ, the priest who offers the sacrifice, and a congregation which itself at the same time offers the divine victim! This straightforward and well-grounded understanding was the devotion — the solid and magnificent devotion — instituted by the holy apostles and handed on by them to the Holy Church. But since, for the reasons I have shown, this devotion became too difficult, other devotions were sought out. These were perfectly good, and they met the needs of the faithful who could not take part (for lack of knowledge or for other reasons) in the great public devotion of the Church. But these [other] devotions — good, yes, but new in form and different from the Church's public devotions — constitute a lesser good for those who could, with a little study, make use of the fundamental ones. And this is because these lesser devotions to some extent lead Christians

astray (because of human limitations) from the public, complete, and outwardly visible union which comes to exist in the Church when the people pray in the same way, in the same sense, and with the same words as the priest So if it is not to be hoped that this situation can be realized as regards the people as a whole, why (I say) could not a congregation of good people (who, we may suppose, will be better instructed than the general run of people, and have gathered themselves together to spread the right attitude to others) propose this to themselves as their aim and study? In a word, I should very much like it if the aim of the Brothers of Charity, as regards their devotional practices, could take the form of learning how to draw, with maximum profit, on all that is to be found in the books which the Church makes use of, and in the holy functions which she publicly carries out In all this, however, I do not propose to go to any rigid extreme, so that every other practice of devotion would have to be banished; indeed, other private devotional practices, too, can be good and necessary, especially in a religious order. No, I only want to indicate in this way what sort of devotion is particularly dear to me.

I beg you not to think that I have said these things as if to read you a lecture; rather, my intention was solely to express a little better what I touched on — perhaps obscurely — in my previous letter.

Recommend me to the Lord.

Yours devotedly,

A. R.

## 5. To Don Silvestro Belli<sup>3</sup> in Rome

Rovereto, 16 May 1825

How envious I am of those in the cloister! Solitude offers me an invitation at once great and painful. But the times we live in give hardly any importance to the safe and blessed haven of the hermitage. It would be a small matter to put up with mockery and derision, if we were not also prevented from resorting to cloistered peace. If only, though, we were so strong that the one who orders us to engage in charitable works, and necessity itself, did not represent a danger for us! But this is something we must ask of God. Yet how can our hearts be in a fit state to pray while they are distracted by human worries and made cold by contact with secular things? In short I beg you, my dear friend, to come to the help of the defects of my worldliness and unfortunate circumstances, for I know well that the grace of God works marvellously to render all things and all actions spiritual. I have no fear that he will not play his part I am only afraid that I may fail in mine. Even study, though it is delightful to my human disposition, is still not capable of satisfying my soul. And so I understand that what we need is a better sort of study than that of letters. So until we can find for ourselves some suitable subject, some apt text, among the things we give our minds to, we shall not be able to find the peace which can satisfy us. However, among the studies which give me most delight, one of the first places must be given to that activity which for some time I have shared almost daily with certain excellent priests — the reading of that wonderful man, Thomas Aquinas, who 'outsoars others like the eagle'<sup>4</sup>. And besides this study, you would hardly believe the number of things I work on simultaneously (making use of odd scraps of time), and how much I write to add to my own knowledge, and possibly in the future to that of others. But here I am, without noticing it, taking up your time with the slight things that are my concern, while I snatch you away from your own affairs. So for now I will love you and leave you. I await your news...

Remember me before the Lord in your Mass. Adieu.

Yours, Rosmini

---

<sup>3</sup> Canon Silvestro Belli was later made a cardinal. (Cf. *Vita di Antonio Rosmini*, vol. I, p.206.)

<sup>4</sup> This is how Rosmini wrote — and acted — 54 years before Pope Leo XIII recalled the clergy to the study of St Thomas, with the Encyclical *Aeterni Patris*. Rosmini, from his youth onwards, had a great love for St Thomas, and gave long and intensive study to his works (as evidenced in the *Vita*, Vol.I p.157). Clear proof of this is also to be seen throughout his writings, and it can be confidently said that St Thomas was the source from which he drew his own teaching and the master from whom he learnt the wisdom which so largely permeates his writings and which he unstintingly passes on to his contemporaries.

## 6. To the cleric Giulio Todeschi<sup>5</sup> at Trent

Rovereto, 7 January<sup>6</sup> 1825

My dear friend,

[In response to his friend's request Rosmini first gives a brief account of the structure of the Divine Office. He then goes on:] But what am I doing, telling you these things about the Office, when already for some days you have not only become acquainted with it but have actually been reciting it? However, in doing so I have been obedient, as was proper! It is a blessing that you are using the Office, and I am firmly persuaded that by worthily reciting this form of prayer (which was used by so many of the saints, and which is the prayer of the whole Church) our souls can be both consoled and sanctified. Not only does the whole Church sing the Divine Office; in addition, every age of the Church has contributed to its composition. For in it we see the hand of Moses, of David, of the prophets, of Jesus Christ, of the apostles, of the Sovereign Pontiffs; and so wonderful and varied is the food which (wherever we look) our spirit can draw from the Office that any soul full of spiritual hunger can there find itself abundantly satisfied. And so to me it is shameful that some people who have no taste for any spiritual food profess to be scandalized by certain flaws which it seems to them they discover in this volume (which I would not hesitate to call divine). But let us hold it dear, read it devoutly, savouring it, so that our spirit may be raised to God by it, we may implore his graces through it, and from it draw unlimited support and consolation. For it is a great truth, my dear Giulio, that the worthy celebration of Mass and the devout recitation of the Office are quite sufficient to sanctify us priests.

I embrace you. Share this letter with our good clerics and friends. Let us love one another in the Lord. Goodbye.

Your affectionate friend,

R.

---

<sup>5</sup> Todeschi was a native of Rovereto and a dear friend of Rosmini. He became a disciple of his and (so to speak) a pupil in the school of perfection.

<sup>6</sup> The date of this letter is incorrectly given in the Ascetical Letters as 7 June.



## 7. To the Marchesa di Canossa at Verona

Rovereto, 10 December 1825

My dear Marchesa,

I come now to the thing I have most at heart: the Sons of Charity ... They have been constantly in my mind and in my heart; I have thought long and hard about them, turning earnestly to God in prayer. And I have changed my mind about the idea which I previously put forward — a society of laymen. In other words I have come over to your own opinion: that it would be an advantage if it were a congregation of priests. But at the same time a desire has come into my mind that I will perhaps never abandon, though I wait for more light from the Lord so that I may discover what is his will I can do no less than put what I have in mind on this matter before the judgement of your wisdom and prudence. The unchanging spirit of the congregation is what you yourself have sketched out in the Plan you sent me, inspired by the loving Commemorations of the blood shed by our Lord Jesus Christ a spirit of love — love of God and of our neighbour — and of sanctification of self and of others; both contemplation and action, the two hinges of Christian virtue. This aim, held in common by the saints, has shone in the Church in a thousand different ways, always adapting itself to varying circumstances, according to the impulses of the ever-active charity infused into pious souls by the Holy Spirit, who breathes as and where he will, and who (though one in himself) gives various gifts to many, and in this way through love makes himself all things to all men. So when I look at the needs of the Church in our time I see as a principal one some means of uniting the clergy, guiding them and training them for the exercising of charity in such ways as you mention. And to achieve this purpose there seems to me no better way than houses of religious priests such as you envisage — the sons you have conceived in charity.

So the modifications I would suggest do not aim at in any way lessening the various offices of charity that you list, but rather (I would say) at increasing them. And in this connection you might consider how great and sublime is the pastoral care of souls instituted by our Lord in the Church. The heart of a bishop, of a parish priest, must be a sea of charity; for there is no duty of charity that is not already included in their ministry. So this governing, or regulating, or administering (whichever you prefer to call it) within the Church already contains the germ (so to speak) of every institute dedicated to the sanctification of the world and the disseminating of works of charity. This noble model is not to be abandoned, I think of the existing excellent types of institution, the best would be one founded on this principle: the ecclesiastical ministry, with its mission of carrying out every holy and charitable work. Let us extend this, infusing into it the greatest possible order and system, yes, but retaining as far as possible the character of this divine mission. If then the

congregation of the Sons of Charity were organized so as to have such an inclination to incorporate itself into the ministry placed in his Church by Jesus Christ, do you not think that it would share in the perfection of Christ's own institution — the Church — with which it would be so closely associated? This would be a way of answering those who are always afraid that by introducing new institutions one would be causing divisions rather than unity within the Church (the body of which is ever the more strong and beautiful the more it is a unity). I am speaking, you understand, of the external beauty of holy Church: internally it is ever essentially perfect nothing lessens it, just as nothing increases it, for it is infinite in Jesus Christ. How very pleasing it is to me, that idea I have heard from you more than once — that one must have a *great heart*; that our Lord is great; and that a Christian does him wrong if in any way he minimizes Christ! Truly nothing is so vast that it does not seem narrow and restrictive to the heart of a true disciple! From all this you will have gathered the sort of plan by which I would hope (God willing) to see brought into existence a family of priests with religious vows. Here is the first sketch of what I mean:

I — These priests join together for the sake of their own sanctification, and their double aim is *the love of God* and *the love of their neighbour*. By their own choice they devote themselves to *this double aim*; they desire to *contemplate and praise God* in tranquillity and spiritual joy. As for *the exercise of charity towards their neighbour*, they are drawn into this by the requests that are made to them — to which if they are able they respond.

II — They depend *entirely on their superior*, who directs them in the *ordering of charity*. There are, then, no specific duties of charity established for the Congregation as a whole; but on the other hand they are free to take on any without restriction. The duty the Congregation has assumed is that of *exercising charity towards their neighbour* upon being requested to do so, but *in the order of charity*. All this depends on the *wisdom* of superiors, to whom must be addressed the requests of those who have need of these priests; and the superiors, making use of the advice of prudent counsellors, decide whether they have men suitable for fulfilling these requests; and if they have, then they are bound to give the work to them.

III — The *Rules* determine what offices of charity are to be preferred by the superior, where there are a number of requests made at one time and they cannot satisfy them all. The principal rule is that of accepting in the first place works to do with the ecclesiastical ministry, since these contain within themselves the most extensive and fundamental charity.

IV — The one who is made a parish priest is also the superior of the Congregation within that parish. So the offices of the ministry (where these exist) are always identical with the offices of the Congregation.

From what I have said you will understand what sort of preparation is fitting for these priests, such as a long and rigorous noviciate. They must have made a total and lasting sacrifice of themselves to the will of their superiors; they live only for the holy Church, ever ready to die for her. This is what the Sons of Charity, such as you describe them, should become whenever they are asked to undertake such works, and provided that they have the subjects for them. They would be *all things to all men*. But the wisdom of superiors could not entertain commitments other than ones that the Congregation could well and fully sustain.

I await further light from your charity; and I beg you to pray to the Lord for me.

A. R.

## 8. To the Marchesa di Canossa at Verona

Rovereto, 24 January 1826

My dear Marchesa,

(Rosmini first excuses himself for writing to the Marchesa again so soon, explaining that this is the result of his keen interest in the Institute which she has in mind, and that he is anxious for her advice. He then says that he has thought deeply over the difficulties she has mentioned, and now puts forward his suggestions.)

When it comes to founding a religious institute, two questions have to be borne in mind: what is the will of God in regard to the project? And how is this proposal to be viewed in the light of theological teaching and the ordinary indications suggested by human prudence? I am firmly of the belief that all the founders of the greatest religious orders in the Church were people inspired by God, who had shown them (as he had done to Moses) a model of the order which they were predestined to initiate. And I believe that it was as a result of relying on such a foundation that St Cajetan, St Ignatius and the other holy founders you mention were right to exclude from their institutes the *honours* — or I would prefer to say the *burdens* — of the ecclesiastical ministry. This shows that God wished things so: that in those times and circumstances, and given the ends for which the institutes were founded, this exclusion of the ecclesiastical ministry was the best possible thing. And in this connection, I remember reading how Marcellus II, before becoming Pope, argued at length with a prominent Jesuit, maintaining that it would have been better if the Society of Jesus had accepted positions in the ecclesiastical ministry; and that the religious in question, try as he might, could find no adequate argument to convince the Cardinal otherwise — until in the end he adduced the authority of St Ignatius; and then the Cardinal surrendered the case. And this is how it had to be: there is no arguing with such an authority, showing that this was the will of God, and therefore the best course of action, even though human reasoning might have suggested the contrary conclusion. And in fact we can draw a lesson from those words of our Lord when he said that only the Father knows *the times and the moments*; and so, as long as God has not spoken clearly, we cannot (as I see it) settle the matter by human reasoning alone.

Speaking humanly, then, and also according to what my inmost spirit suggests to me, I can well understand how reasonable your fear seems — that this introduction of ecclesiastical responsibilities may be a dangerous thing for a religious order (more so than anything else), given that it is so easy for slackness and laxity to creep in: the very things which, as you wisely reflect, may threaten its mere existence. But in spite of this consideration, I do not think we should do God the wrong of doubting his infinite mercy, or set any limits to the wonders he can work in his servants. This mercy of his shines

forth in the charity of Christ's followers — so much so that St Paul was not afraid to say that such charity can make itself *all things to all men*. His praise of charity borders on the infinite; yet we must not think of it as exaggerated in any way. The apostle shows us charity as all-powerful and able to triumph over everything; and for my part I firmly believe that God wishes to add to his glory by bringing it about that his servants, through the love which animates them, can cope with any earthly dignity without in the least being contaminated by it. Rather I should say that such a signal victory over any danger from worldly or ecclesiastical ambition has already been found in innumerable servants of God who have borne external dignities while preserving a profound humility of spirit. You can see how great is this sort of virtue, even though it is less obvious and impressive than that which is devoid of all external show; how meritorious is this kind of victory; how dear it must be in God's eyes, and how useful to men! It seems to me to manifest the most perfect charity, like that which our Lord identified with the sacrifice made by the perfect pastor, saying: *The Good Shepherd gives his life for his sheep* — as he had earlier said: *No man has greater love than he who gives his life for his friends*. And so the pastoral ministry includes as proper to it the act of perfect charity. This is why St Thomas Aquinas, in the small work he wrote on the perfection of the spiritual life, shows how the episcopal state is the most perfect of all, greater even than religious life, precisely because of this perfection of charity to which it is permanently committed; and how the other ecclesiastics who have the care of souls also practise an act of more perfect charity than religious, even though one cannot say that they are in a more perfect state, since they are not permanently attached to the pastoral ministry. Jesus Christ has placed in the pastoral ministry the seeds of all perfection; and there is nothing that shows a more perfect and fitting combination than that of religious profession joined with the pastoral ministry: each makes profession of the perfect life; and this can consist in nothing other than charity.

You will perhaps answer that you admit the perfection of the pastoral ministry, but at the same time recognize that it is very difficult in practice — so much so that all holy men have (as far as they could) fled from it. To the first of these difficulties it is easy enough for me to reply that, provided that the shepherd has entered by the gate of the sheepfold, and not (like the thief) by the window, then he will find within the pastoral ministry itself an abundance of divine grace to support the burden he bears. It is the Prince of Pastors who gives this support to his co-workers; otherwise Jesus Christ, when he established the pastoral ministry, would have placed in the world a peril for souls. So while we recognize and fear the danger of vanity, or at least the great responsibility inherent in ecclesiastical office, we must not exaggerate these things to the point where we do God an injustice, so to speak, by lacking confidence in the power of his grace when he gives us this mission.

With regard to the second difficulty: I entirely agree with you, and with the judgements of these holy men: that ecclesiastical posts are not merely not to

be sought after, but are to be avoided by any individual, so far as the matter depends on him. But you will I am sure have taken into account the second of the four points I put to you in my previous letter, where I made it clear that in the Institute (as I see it) no individual member may aspire to anything in the world — being obliged to unlimited obedience; and that he entirely depends on his superior's Council, which will decide all appointments, whether to honourable or humble offices. So it is simply the wisdom of this Council, presided over by the superior, which must reach a judgement over the suitability of the members and their maturity, and then decide whether they can be exposed to such dangers. And it is important, too, to allow for the fact that these deliberations, according to the Constitutions of the Order, have to be made quite independently of any external considerations. In the outline I sent you, the four articles did not of course go into details about the precautions that are needed in practice. I would ask you also to notice that not all holy men have regarded religious life as incompatible with the pastoral ministry: indeed St Augustine and St Eusebius aimed to combine the two, as did St Charles Borromeo in the sixteenth century. Further, it was the work of these three saints and their imitators which was responsible at various times for the reform of the clergy — in other words, of the Church itself.

If you consider the matter from another point of view you will see how well adapted to the needs of the present time is the proposed Institute. In these days there is need of people who are well-armed against all dangers: this is not a time for fleeing from the perils that threaten us, but for taking up arms against them. If we are to bring benefits to our age, it must be done through holy actions, through Christian exertions. We must fight our enemies with their own weapons. I would venture to say that if men of old could afford to restrict themselves to acquiring one particular virtue, nowadays it is necessary for them to show all the virtues and have no weak spots. Grace, which builds on nature, and makes use of nature's progress to shine with a new light, seems also to make it easier, at this stage of human development, to acquire a more complete and solid virtue; and it would follow that some dangers, such as honours and dignities, are less to be feared now than they were in previous times. External honours, for instance, cannot make such an impression on a man who is both holy and learned as they might have made on one who was holy, yes, but ignorant too. The first has many reasons, even humanly speaking, for thinking little of them; the second has only his piety to help him. Moreover, the world has become so disdainful and hard to please nowadays that I believe the only way to help it is to confront it with the very ministry of Jesus Christ, for he alone is divine and invincible.

But this ministry, perhaps you will insist, is still full of dangers; and this is precisely why in my view it is in need of greater helps and more protection. Which is the greater charity: that which tries to help those states of life which are comparatively free from danger, or that which provides props and supports for those in greatest peril? If it were possible to take away every

dignity in the world, I can see very well how many threats to human weakness would thus be banished; but if there have to be dignities, if their existence is so necessary that even the Church of Jesus Christ could not live without them, what can we do except consider how they can be sanctified? And how can we better provide a defence against the dangers that accompany them than by educating the future ministers in the holiness of religious life and, I would even say, religious life in its most rigorous form (as in our own case)? This most severe training would be given to those who might have to bear such dignities; they would be formed by a long preparation, and not put to the test until they had successfully undergone repeated trials of their genuine humility and self-abasement

Perhaps you will reply that this could be done rather by seeing to it that the Institute assists those destined for the pastoral ministry, and helps to train *suitable ministers for the sanctuary* — though without itself taking on any such ministry? My dear Marchesa, in my understanding of the matter the spirit of pride is very subtle, and insinuates itself where one would hardly suspect. If we give to religious the task of teaching pastors, of preparing suitable parish priests, we run the risk that these good religious may think themselves a cut above mere parish priests and pastors; and while retaining an appearance of humility, be inwardly penetrated by a subtle pride: something that I would fear more than any external dignity. This is not just a theory, but something I have experienced in practice. I know of a certain house of excellent religious who are busily engaged in giving retreats to parish priests, in examining them and so on; but I confess to you that it has seemed to me that this activity was very dangerous to their humility, and that the devil knew very well how to infect them with a spirit of complacency and vanity. In fact it seems to me a very great danger when a simple religious is placed over a group of parish priests or other dignitaries to preach to them and instruct them. If we have managed to become so strong and perfect in spirit as not to be afraid of these interior temptations, then I fully believe that exterior ones will be the more easily overcome. And another thing is this: these simple religious very seldom have any knowledge of the world, very seldom are sufficiently learned. As far as they personally are concerned, it is enough if they lead blameless lives, I know; but if they are to instruct others they need a thorough knowledge both of doctrine and of the ways of the world. Now these things are not got simply from books: what is needed is experience in the duties of the ministry. This is itself a day-to-day school, for it involves a priest in a continuous study of two things: of the human heart; and of the situation of the world which he is trying to help. Unless he really knows the world it would be a miracle if he were able to help it; and he is unqualified to train others to help it. The most important thing needed for the exercising of charity is *prudence*, which must be accompanied by *charity*. Now this prudence cannot be acquired without experience of human affairs. So I should like to sanctify this prudence: to see that pastors, whose sole art consists in this *prudent exercise of charity*, were enabled to acquire it without

being exposed to danger. But this quality cannot be imparted to them by simple religious; and their lack of knowledge of the world shows in a certain disdain for anything that falls outside their limited experience, and their failure to appreciate its importance. And this in its turn produces in them a kind of awkwardness which creates a sort of mutual alienation between them and worldly people. Lastly, though I would not deny that simple religious can train pastors, it would be so much better and more conformable to the institution of Jesus Christ if pastors could instruct religious! If pride consists in an excessive self-esteem, in overrating one's own position, then it would seem to me more dangerous for the simple religious to instruct the pastor than for the pastor to instruct the religious. Ought we not to believe that the mission entrusted by Jesus Christ to the priest should be a defence against this danger?

You have wisely pointed out that ecclesiastical dignities and honours have been more of a danger to those Orders which were intended to be private and hidden, rather than to one which of its nature permitted them. But the spirit of the sort of institute that my heart is set on (since this seems to be the will of God) aims at not only *the humility of the individual members*, (who decide nothing for themselves and are not responsible for the decisions of their superiors) but at *the humility of the whole body*, which I consider very important. The Institute as such has a contemplative nature, and by its own inclination dedicates itself to prayer and study. It takes on charitable works solely in response to the requests made to it by those who are in need of help. I think every effort should be made to preserve this attitude, seeing how nearly all religious communities quickly acquire what is called *esprit de corps*. This to us constitutes a certain limitation, deriving from a hidden pride —not an individual thing but something collective, though its effects spread to its members. There is then a lessening of that charity which seeks to unite all men in a single body, no matter what their ties, their membership of a particular society, their differences. Bearing this in mind, you will see why it is that I find so pleasing that saying of yours — that the Congregation we have in mind should truly take its origins on Calvary, between the crucified Jesus and our Lady of Sorrows. But we must not forget that Jesus did not suffer on Calvary for the sake of any private devotion, but rather because by his actions he was fulfilling the greatest duty of a pastor, which is to give his life for his sheep; he was exercising the highest prerogative of the Church, a prerogative which unites in one and the same person the priest and the victim acceptable to the Father, the source of all the prerogatives and of the entire ministry of holy Church.

My dear Marchesa, I ask you to pardon the liberty I take if I ask you to think deeply about this important matter, which could bring much good to the Church, if this is indeed part of God's plan. Believe me, even the religious who of his own choice flees from the world would not be acting in a spirit of perfection if he were to refuse to leave the delightful silence of the cloister and go to the help of his brothers in the world when charity called upon him to do this. Nowadays



if we are to make a perfect flight from the world we must do so in spirit, as did the apostles; we cannot be content with a merely external action. I see very well that the most pleasant course is to cut oneself off entirely from this wretched and dangerous world; but what we must seek is not what pleases us most and is dear to us, but what is most dear to God and most advantageous to his kingdom. So while in our hearts we live in the wilderness, let us not refuse to leave it when the voice of superiors — which is the voice of God himself — calls us forth. For he who calls us will support us.

Forgive me for this long letter: put it down to my desire for the glory of God, and believe me that I am

Yours,

A. R.

## 9. To Don Gasparo Bertoni<sup>7</sup> at Verona

Milan, 15 March 1826

Dear Sir,

[This letter, with its very long enclosure, is included because it throws light on the evolution of the plan of the Society of Charity in Rosmini's mind.]

Of your kindness, allow me to get in touch with you by letter, following my visit which perhaps wasted some of your precious time. My only reason for writing is to avail myself of your enlightened counsel. I have already spoken to you of the very keen desire I have cherished for some time, a desire which I hope is from God, namely, to live under a rule in the company of some other priests. I have also explained to you the general lines on which I would like to establish such a community, and have received your encouragement. Before starting anything, however, I intend to ascertain what our Holy Father thinks of the matter, for fear the whole thing may be an illusion on my part and ought to be abandoned; although deep down within me I do not think this is the case. I have therefore prepared an outline of the general idea which I am sending you herewith. Please return it to me here in Milan with your comments.

It will be somewhat difficult to make a start, but it would not be necessary at the outset to adhere fully to the rule of strict seclusion which would be observed later, nor to wait for demands to be made on our services. We might at first (should God send us some good companions) establish ourselves near some church where we could conduct the services on Sundays and feast-days, hear confessions and perhaps do some teaching — which would justify our position in the eyes of the people. I should be very pleased to have your opinion on all this, and hope you will help me if you think the inspiration comes from God.

Believe me, I am your most humble and grateful servant,

A. R.

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<sup>7</sup> Don Bertoni was the venerable founder of the priests known as the Stimatini or Bertoniani

## PLAN OF A SOCIETY OF PRIESTS DEDICATED TO CHARITY

1. The Society shall be composed of priests animated by a keen desire to sanctify themselves in the state in which the divine mercy has placed them and to do all in their power to relieve their fellow-men in their spiritual and bodily needs through all kinds of charitable works. They shall be united for this twofold purpose and shall consecrate their association to our Redeemer Jesus Christ crucified for us in the excess of his love, to Mary Most Holy, Queen of Martyrs, and to all the saints.
2. Believing, however, that these two purposes are to be achieved in different ways, they shall adopt in the first place, by their own choice and as an Institute, the first purpose alone: their own sanctification, through acts of love for God, interior mortification and complete self-sacrifice. They shall place themselves in a state of deep and continual recollection, adding, however, to their prayer and contemplation the study of things human and divine.
3. It shall not be their intention to recite the Divine Office solemnly in choir, because of the charitable works which will be mentioned later, but as far as possible they shall recite the Office in common.
4. It is not considered advisable for them to bind themselves by solemn vows, but only by the three simple vows, to which they add a fourth vow of absolute obedience to the Roman Pontiff.
5. They shall choose this state of deep recollection not only for its own sake, but as a *state of preparation* for all the works of charity to which God may call them.

Like all other societies, this association of priests shall necessarily be divided into superiors and subjects.

Subjects are bound by vow to obey their superiors, so they must be ready to offer complete submission to all their lawful commands.<sup>8</sup> A genuine vocation to the Society of Charity requires a sincere intention to become indifferent to all that obedience commands, whether pleasant or unpleasant, prestigious or humiliating, advantageous or detrimental to their temporal interests. Obedience must be at once the object of all their love and the source of all their happiness. This annihilation of their own will, or rather this conformity of their own will to that of their superiors, must also extend to all their charitable works. They must indeed entertain a general ardent desire to practise charity in every possible way, even to the shedding of their blood for others after the example of Jesus Christ crucified; but this must be according to the law of perfect obedience. Among all possible works of charity they must prefer above all those enjoined by obedience. By reason of this indifference which is

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<sup>8</sup> 'Within reasonable limits', as the writer has laid down in the rules of the Institute.

extended to all works of charity, the Fathers *are not limited by rule to any particular type of work*, but are ready to undertake any work, no matter how burdensome, once it is commanded. It is therefore left to the judgement of superiors to decide on one charitable work rather than another at any given time, and to limit or extend such works according to the needs and intentions of the Church of Jesus Christ, whose glory alone they must have continually in mind and heart.

This Congregation of priests must never aim at *its own advantage*, but only at the general good of the Church. It must not seek in any way the interests of its members individually, or even the interests of the Congregation itself. Special rules will be made to prevent this Society from having any other spirit than that of the entire Church, as far as the divine mercy grants this to human weakness.

As regards the superiors who are entrusted with the maintenance of discipline and the government of the Congregation and must assign to each member his particular work of charity, they should be guided by the following rules: (1) in accordance with the spirit of recollection and preparation which should characterize this Congregation, the superiors will watch over the observance of constant seclusion, silence, prayer and study, the nature of which they will decide, aiming at the greater good of the Church; (2) they must listen readily to any request for their charitable services. They must not *refuse any request for their charity*, and as far as lies in their power, by means of the members of the Congregation they will minister to the needs of their neighbour as made known to them. These requests, however, may be so numerous and of such a nature that they cannot all be satisfied simultaneously. In this case the superiors must decide prudently according to the *order of charity*. This order of charity has three aspects: (a) the perfection with which the charitable work can be carried out; (b) the preservation of the Institute; and (c) the intrinsic value of the work itself.

As regards the first aspect, superiors must not accept any works of charity with which they are unable to cope on account of the fewness or inability of their members, for when a work is beyond the capacity of those to whom it is entrusted, it produces little or no good and may even disedify; in addition it may be harmful to the subjects concerned. Superiors must take pains to ascertain the strength and ability of each one, and assign tasks accordingly. As regards the second aspect, that of the preservation of the Institute, this is of the greatest importance, since the Institute does not confine itself to any particular work, but embraces all works of charity. Hence it is not at variance with the spirit of the Institute that its members be sent out of the community for motives of charity; but it should be borne in mind that such separation might weaken considerably the bond of union. It will therefore be advisable at the outset to use great caution in accepting charitable responsibilities outside the community. It will be well, instead, to avoid in the beginning any works

which tend to diminish that mutual union which, God willing, must be allowed to strike deep roots. This is all the more important since there should always be good reason to believe that a work begun will not be abandoned after a short time.

Finally, superiors who undertake and assign works of charity on request must take into consideration the intrinsic value of the works in question and be guided by fixed rules. The first of these rules is that preference should be given to the duties of the ministry instituted by Jesus Christ in his Church, as these contain the most fundamental charity, or rather the root and germ of all possible duties of Christian charity. The superiors of the Congregation prefer these duties of the ecclesiastical ministry to all others (except when the two previous considerations oblige them to act otherwise) for this reason also, that the Fathers of Charity are thus enabled to imitate more closely our Redeemer and High Priest, Jesus Christ, whose example they profess to follow. Moreover the Congregation earnestly desires in all its labours of charity to be founded on the *divine mission*, well aware of the wealth of grace which Jesus Christ communicates to those whom he sends forth to spread the fruits of his divine charity among men. It wishes to do nothing of its own accord, but everything in conformity with the known will of God.

Hence the method followed by this Society is that of imitating as far as possible the divine institution of the Church as founded by Jesus Christ, at least from the moment at which the Congregation undertakes the care of souls and emerges from the hidden and secluded life which is its state of predilection. It is desirable that the duties of government of the Congregation and the care of souls should always be combined in the same person. If then a Father of Charity is appointed to take charge of a parish, he is both parish priest and superior of the community already established or to be established in that parish, keeping distinct, however, the rights of the two offices. The various superiors of houses existing in different parishes (because two independent houses may never exist in the same parish) are dependent on the superior who lives in the cathedral city, and so on.

Although these Fathers of Charity are bound to absolute poverty in relation to their superiors, they may hold property in the eyes of the law and have civil rights as individuals, but never as members of a Congregation.

Before taking any steps to form such an association it is felt to be absolutely necessary to submit the project to the Roman Pontiff, in order to ascertain whether its realization is for any reason inadvisable, and also to be reassured and encouraged by the Apostolic Blessing and then to set to work, as soon as a suitable opportunity presents itself, in accordance with the will of God.

Remarks on the nature of the Society of Charity  
and the possibility of combining it with any  
good and useful institution.

The general tendency of the Society of Charity is to promote the closest possible union among good Christians and to strengthen the ties of Christian fellowship, so that the members of this association thus closely united may be more keenly aware of their dignity and greatness as Christians. This awareness will encourage them to live united with one another, with their visible head, the Roman Pontiff, and with their invisible head, Jesus Christ, so that the society of Christians upon earth may be strengthened against the spirit of the world. It is the writer's deep conviction that Christian society is being constantly though silently impelled in this direction by the spirit of Jesus Christ which animates and guides it.

The writer is also persuaded that Christian society, by reason of its tendency to acquire this union and strength, is being drawn nearer to that model which Jesus Christ had in view in founding the Church; that he constituted her in such a way that by means of this type of organization the entire society of mankind should gradually acquire greater regularity and perfection even in all its external relations.

The bonds of union initially established by Jesus Christ were certainly perfect, but they were entirely spiritual. He left these spiritual forces to produce in the course of ages, like fruitful seed, their infallible effect even on temporal things and to regulate and sanctify all things according to his word: *When I shall be lifted up from the earth I will draw all things to myself.*

The work of divine Providence, then, during the time allotted to the Church's conflict on earth, is to draw all things, even what belongs to the exterior of society, into subjection to Jesus Christ and thus bring all things into Christian society and give all their proper place in it. Thus will be realized the good order that completes the entire and perfect organization of the Church which began, as we have said, with a spiritual union, the seed and root of the plant which must grow and develop in trunk and branches, even to the smallest twig and leaf.

This being said, if we are to see how all human things must find their place in the Church, in it be subjected to the spiritual bonds established by Jesus Christ, and adapt themselves so well that human society may eventually attain perfection, we must discover what these spiritual bonds are which constitute the organization of Christian society: in other words the Church of Jesus Christ.

These bonds are the ecclesiastical authorities, especially the Pope, the bishops and parish priests. Hence the Society of Charity, intended to assist in this

development of the Church of Jesus Christ, has nothing else in view than these three chief grades of authority. In all its activities it aims at bringing all other human institutions into subjection to these authorities (always in the measure, however, and as far as the nature of these institutions may allow). All of them may be termed *works of charity*, for every action of a Christian should be an expression of his love for God and his fellow-men, since mutual love is the distinguishing mark which Christ gave to the members of the society he founded.

The writer believes that human institutions have a very precarious and fortuitous existence until they are transformed into real works of charity and regularly incorporated into the Church by the three grades of ecclesiastical authority, the Pope, the bishops and the parish priests.

For this reason the Society of Charity does not refuse to undertake these works of charity, and all of them can find their right place there when their connection with the Society is brought into line with the aims of the Society as a whole. It would seem, moreover, that the undertaking of such works would favour both the Society of Charity and the further consolidation, extension and durability of the works themselves. Hence those good Christians who co-operate in this association are furthering at the same time the work which Jesus Christ had in view, to regularize all human things and establish perfect order in human society. All this will be done unobtrusively as a natural consequence of the spiritual principles of the gospel and of the form he gave to his holy Church.

Explanation of the order in which the superiors  
of the Brothers of Charity make their choice  
among the charitable works requested.

In the outline of the Brothers of Charity it has been said that the *order of charity* (with regard to the present subject) has three aspects: first, the *degree of perfection* with which the work may be accomplished; second, the *preservation of the Institute*; and third, the *intrinsic value of the work itself*. With regard to the last aspect it has been said that the chief rule is to give preference to the duties of the sacred ministry instituted by Jesus Christ in his Church, as containing the most fundamental charity of all, or rather the seed and root of all possible works of Christian charity.

It seems advisable to explain here what is meant by *the intrinsic value of the work*. By this is meant not only the greater advantage which could result for men from this work, but also the perfection of the work as a means of promoting God's glory and implementing the spirit of the Congregation, the aim of which is the sanctification of its members and the glory of God. Now the duties of the ecclesiastical ministry are conducive both to God's glory and to the welfare of men. The priest's pastoral charity consists, on the one hand, in

the sacrifice of the immaculate Lamb, centre and source of all perfect devotion, adoration and glory to God; and on the other hand, the sacrifice of himself for the salvation of his flock, for the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. This self-sacrifice includes every act of charity that may be conducive to the welfare of the flock, so that the state of the pastor is a most perfect one.

As regards the other acts and duties of charity, the spirit of the Congregation is inclined to prefer the work of caring for the poor of Jesus Christ, honouring in them the image of the divine Master. This tendency of the Congregation towards making the poor the object of its delight and tender solicitude is due in the first place to the fact that Jesus Christ has recommended us to do so in the solemn words which will form the substance of the judgement passed on Christians on the Last Day: *I was hungry and you fed me*. In the second place, this care and solicitude for the poor must characterize the Congregation of the Brothers of Charity because their own spirit must be one of perfect poverty. Since they make genuine profession of poverty, it is only right and conducive to their own practice of poverty that they should associate and converse with the poorest and most abject of their fellow men. This close contact with the poor should prove all the more advantageous to the Congregation since it is possible that its members, in their readiness to serve their neighbour in every possible way, may be called upon to work among the higher classes of society, with great danger to their poverty of spirit and to the love of a life of humiliation and privation chosen by our Redeemer and his perfect disciples. Hence a work promising a wide influence should not always be chosen in preference to works of charity among the poor. Only when all the requests in the latter sphere have been satisfied should works in other fields be undertaken, or at least when the Congregation has a sufficient number of works among the needy to enable it to maintain close contact with this class as recommended by our Lord, a class of people who bear the closest resemblance to the Congregation of the Brothers of Charity.

Among the poor themselves the Congregation has a special predilection for children, whom our Lord recommended to us particularly when he said: *Suffer little children to come to me*. It gives a special place among its charitable works to the education of the children of the poor.

#### A further explanation of the project of the Sons of Charity

At the outset, the foundation of the Sons of Charity with the modification proposed by the writer may meet with difficulty by reason of the article which states that priests who enter this Congregation, while living in a state of deep recollection and continual preparation in order to be ready to carry out in a holy manner the duties of Christian charity, must not take such duties upon themselves unless requested by their superiors to do so.



This difficulty has reference to the *modus operandi* of the Sons of Charity<sup>9</sup>. Now, in this institution we must distinguish clearly between two classes of persons: in other words, between those who obey and work and those who govern and issue orders. As regards those who obey and work, organization presents no difficulty as long as they are well instructed and willing to practise *obedience* and *charity*. Their preparation and virtuous attitude must lead them to practise blind and absolute obedience, to which they are necessarily bound by vow. This obliges them to do everything commanded by their superiors, whether pleasant or unpleasant, whether it earns them honour or ignominy, *per infamiam et per bonam famam*. In the second place, they must love charity towards their neighbour for its own sake, and not allow any personal whim or taste to enter into their practice of it. They must carry out any charitable work whatsoever with equal cheerfulness and efficacy. In a word, their constant attitude should be one of complete indifference towards all particular works of charity; they should prefer the work assigned by their superiors to any other work, and be happy to resemble as far as possible Jesus Christ, who always did the things his Father told him to do and nothing else. One cannot arrive at this attitude of mind except by stirring up in oneself a great love of God and remaining in a state of deepest recollection. The difficulty with regard to practising works of charity requested by the faithful does not therefore arise where those who work and obey are concerned, for these do not respond to the requests of the faithful, but act all the time in obedience to orders from their superiors. The difficulty in question concerns only those who issue orders and hold the reins of government; but I say that these may make exceptions to the rule at the outset, until the Institute has found its feet. In other words, superiors may undertake spontaneously a reasonable number of charitable duties such as are required to start the Institute on its way. When these initial duties have been decided, the superiors should prudently arrange the preparatory exercises in order that the constant prayer of their priests and their assiduous study may provide them with the foundation on which alone they can raise up the edifice of charity.

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<sup>9</sup> Two other difficulties were raised and were resolved by the writer. The first had reference to the Superior General who, should the Institute spread, would necessarily live in Rome, and so outside the Italian State [of that period]. The other difficulty concerned the exemption of the Sons of Charity from the ordinary jurisdiction of the bishops. As neither of these points is of an ascetical nature, they are not dealt with here. An account of them can be found in the *Epistolario Completo*.

## 10. To Mgr Luschin, Bishop of Trent

Milan, 16 April 1826

My Lord,

I have received your Lordship's much-appreciated letter, in which you invite me to tell you whether I should like to hold some post in our diocese. Bound as I am to speak openly and without reserve to your Lordship, I must tell you that I desire nothing — and never have desired anything — other than to carry out in all things the divine will as far as I know it.

When I had only just returned after my studies, Mgr the Vicar wished me to undertake the ministry of the confessional, and I accepted this. Very soon after this came the death of my father, and this laid on me the sacred duty of seeing to the completion of my brother's upbringing; and now I have the consolation of seeing him solidly established in sound principles and the practice of religion, well placed to be the support and consolation of his aged mother. In the meanwhile I have also put in order the affairs of her family and mine, which at the death of my father were in some confusion. I have also made good provision for my dear sister. On this same principle of carrying out the duties of the state in which God has placed me and neglecting nothing of what I believed to be his will, I have never sought of my own accord for any responsibility; at the same time I have never refused what was offered me. When I was asked by some clerical students who were studying in my home diocese to tutor them in philosophy, I did so for a year. When I was asked to give them exercises in preaching I helped them. Asked by some priests to go over some theological points with them, I did this for about three years to the best of my ability. I made it a matter of conscience not to refuse the duty of preaching or officiating or any other duty in the parish to which I belonged, whenever the parish priest made such a request of me. When I was called away from the city to help some parish in need, I likewise went — as on the occasion first of the illness and then the death of my friend the parish priest of Lizzana. When he found himself unable, for lack of strength, to carry out his Lenten duties, he called upon me to help him out. Whatever time has remained to me over and above these and similar calls on me, I managed not to waste, but applied myself to the studies that were most suitable to my state and most helpful to my neighbour. These I also felt to be necessary, too, at the time when I had barely left the Schools and saw myself to be by no means sufficiently trained. It was at this juncture that I undertook various studies which called for sustained effort. These I am still engaged in, and this is one of the reasons why, since I wish to complete this work, it is unavoidable that for some time I must be away from home. If I could believe that the voice of duty called me to leave these labours — which at present are well advanced — I would very willingly drop them at once, making a sacrifice to God of the exertions

which up to now I have expended. Your Lordship can see, then, my mind. I only want to do what is best. This great city [Milan], where I have so many good friends and patrons, would hold no attraction for me against the promptings of my duty. As far as I can see, I am indifferent to living here rather than elsewhere, provided that I can hope to do what is best. Wise heads, people who know about my studies, greatly encourage me to avoid, as far as possible, any interruption of them. Your Lordship's letter, it seemed to me, called for these explanations, and so I beg you to excuse me if I have dwelt at length upon myself, taking up your time. It caused me much distress to write in this manner...

A. Rosmini

## 11. To Padre Lorenzo Franza at Piovezzano

Milan, 5 May 1826

Dear Sir,

... your letter and your poem reached me in Milan. Both seemed to reveal in you a certain agitation of mind and some depression. This caused me concern, and I beg you earnestly to take courage and not allow melancholy to get a grip on you. You know how the good St Philip [Neri] used to say: 'I will have neither scruples nor sadness in my house.' Let us remain in a state of happiness —not the happiness which is found in the world, which is boisterous and which dissipates the spirit, rather, a quiet and placid joyfulness, which has its source mainly in the purity of our conscience, in the grace of the Holy Spirit which is diffused in our hearts, and in our resignation to the divine will. Oh, what a consoling and joyful thing it is to be attentive, diligently and with good will, to serving God — to corresponding with the lofty duties of our vocation! I truly believe that in this we shall find peace and comfort, when all our care is devoted to what is solid and substantial. Everything else we shall regard with indifference as being merely ephemeral. I am glad about what you tell me — that you treat poetry as a pastime. You do well in this: for us, poetry can be no more than a trifle, something which can refresh the tired spirit and fit it once more for its more important duties. We are priests, not poets. When you act like this you will find refreshment; and you will be greatly helped also if you avoid worldly and unfitting company and associate with good priests, with whom you will find sound and honest enjoyment. Again, devotion to our Lady is a wonderful help in bringing serenity to a downcast spirit. The kindly light of our Star is a comfort in every danger. Recommend me to the Blessed Virgin, and believe that I am

Your affectionate and devoted servant,

A. R.

## 12. To Count Clemente de Brandis at Venice

Milan, 18 June 1826

... for some time I have been in Milan. I came here mainly so as to be able to devote myself more peacefully to my beloved studies; because you know how at home it is so easy to find oneself disturbed by frequent interruptions. Here I am, you could say, far from all cares; and so it seems to me that I can better carry out the will of God. For so far it would appear that he wishes me to occupy myself with study rather than with other activities.

I am very pleased with the religious spirit of the Milanese, and I assure you that I have found some quite exceptional people, not only among the clergy but also among the principal families of the city. Of all the places where I have been long enough to form a judgement, I have never found such virtue and sound religion as in this city. The two extremes of society are outstanding; and if there is anything wrong, (and you know how the seeds of evil, unfortunately, flourish everywhere) it is among the middle classes. On the other hand, I can only attribute the true goodness I find here to the excellent seeds sown in this fertile soil by St Charles [Borromeo]. It is through him that there is evidence everywhere not only of the great works with which he adorned the city, but also of his living spirit. The spirit of religion is shown by the way both external observance and internal devotion flourish side by side; because when a man is genuinely full of the Spirit he cannot help showing it in his outward behaviour, as the Founder of our religion specially commanded. And in this external manifestation of interior grace consists the fulfilment and perfection of piety — which is not ashamed to give glory to God in every way, even in face of a world which stupidly despises what it does not understand. The outward expression of the religious spirit, then, gives edification to all those of upright heart who see it; for since our senses are part of our make-up, we must mutually stimulate one another through external things. It is very true that human beings, in their imperfection, tend to rest satisfied by external things alone; and this gives rise both to a somewhat superficial and materialistic religion and to hateful hypocrisy. But a deplorable mistake is made by those who, from seeing that sometimes people give an appearance of devotion while at the same time committing grave faults, deduce from this that all the external aids to piety do more harm than good. How can it ever be right to judge things by their abuse rather than by their right use? Certainly if religion itself is not perfect and spiritual (and this is the case with all faiths other than our own), then in such a situation, exterior aids can do nothing — because the religion is lacking in that power of conversion which is able to penetrate and change the heart of man. But the external practices of our religion share in the divine power which informs it. In order to understand this, we have to take a general view, and not limit ourselves to seeing that certain people stubbornly put up a resistance to the power which is continuously manifested to them. We can be

persuaded of this when, as has happened to me a number of times in Italy, we come across people who are profoundly Christian, who unite in themselves all the virtues, and who draw from external practices the most active and solid nourishment for their heroic charity.

From thinking about these things, and from closely examining the facts, I am convinced that Italy really is in general a god-fearing country; and I do not know that God has in any other land a greater number of lofty souls who are privileged and chosen by him. Though if we simply look at things with the opposite prejudice (or if we judge only by external accidentals), we may come to a contrary judgement. From this, it seems to me, we can draw the conclusion that the imagination is a gift of God for which we ought to be very grateful — provided that we turn our imagination not to false and chimerical things but rather to what is true and holy. But many people profane this faculty; because when they talk of the imagination they always take it to be something which is merely a producer of dreams and fantasies. Whereas they ought rather to see in the imagination a means of vividly feeling about distant things, and of bringing them closer and into sharper perspective, as though they were present. Lately I have enjoyed reading a fine work of Leibnitz which you probably know. It is called *A Theological System*, and was only recently published. My pleasure came from seeing how this great man explains and defends the principles of our Catholic religion. When he comes to speak about images, he too defends the right use of the imagination in representing truths by means of signs; and in this connection he says (among many other things) of Italians: 'When I sought for an explanation of this, I decided that it proceeds from the genius of this people. For the dwellers in these regions have always possessed more than usually lively imaginations, and hence have been the more exact in their rites. Hence it is no wonder that these people shudder (as at some sacrilege) when they understand that the honour to Christ and the saints which they pay through their images is withheld in some places (though this can sometimes come about through good and praiseworthy zeal); for the Italians see the originals of these images as if they were present; and they establish remote connections between things through their genius ... and therefore they are more sensitive and exquisite [in their worship].'

You will perhaps say that by going on at such length I am sending you a treatise rather than a letter. But forgive me if, in dealing with a friend who is as truly religious as you, I find very great delight in discussing the things that are closest to our hearts — that is, [things to do with] religion itself. For it seems to me that one of the greatest blessings of friendship consists in being able to reason freely about what one loves most, and to draw from a friend the support and the illumination of his reply ...

Affectionately,

A. R. p.

### 13. To Don Giovanni Stefani<sup>10</sup> at Lisbon

Milan, 13 September 1826

I have today received your kind letter (undated) ... I am glad to hear of your stay there, since I am sure you will be able to help your young charge. Oh, do all you can to ensure that he appreciates the dignity of being a member of the Church of Jesus Christ, of this immense, divine society to which it is only right that we should turn all our thoughts. Friendship is a fine thing, but how much finer is love for Holy Church! Family affection, again, is laudable; so too is love for our birthplace, our native land. But oh, may our family, our people, our fatherland, be so many means of promoting the glory of the Church of God! A Christian should only consider them as parts of a greater and more sublime society, of the great society of the Church; since through the grace we have received, our families, our peoples, our nations, are part of the Church of Christ; and the part should be subservient to the whole. Try to imprint this deeply in the soul of your pupil; happy will he be if he receives this impression, and carries it indelibly through his whole life! On the other hand, you too will be happy, even if, when you have made every effort, it should happen that these efforts bear no fruit. To obtain merit in God's sight, the attempt to form a devout son of the Church is itself sufficient. So you will probably benefit this young man, and you will certainly benefit yourself. When you have been there a year or so, if you would like to pay me a visit, how gladly I will receive you! But will you want to come? When I think of the future I greatly fear that you may not. Who knows in what state I shall then find myself? Perhaps in one which will make you shun me ... [He is alluding to the religious state, and the Institute of Charity which he was to found two years later, and of which he was currently cherishing hopes.] I therefore make one request do not take any decision regarding yourself without letting me know. The love I have for you gives me this right

For the last six months I have been in Milan. How attached my heart is to the memory of St Charles ... It seems to me that it would be difficult to find another city more pious than this ...

I commend you to God — please do as much for me.

Yours,

A. R.

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<sup>10</sup> Don Stefani had been a friend of Rosmini from the time when they had been students together at the University of Padua. He had gone as tutor to a noble Genoese family who had moved to Lisbon

## 14. To Don Giulio Todeschi at Merano

Rovereto, 30 September 1826

My dear friend and beloved brother in our Lord Jesus Christ,

Your letters are always dear to me, because ... they contain the name of our Lord and Redeemer. Oh, how truly and with what good reason did St Bernard say that no book seemed to him to have savour if he did not meet in it that most lovable of all names, the name of Jesus! At least this is how it should be: everything should be insipid to those who have been redeemed unless signed and seasoned with this name. Unhappy me, that I am not worthy to pronounce it... That letter of yours which reached me in Milan is adorned with this name, and the one which I recently received also has the same embellishment — better than any pagan embroidery. Thank you for both of them.

In the Milan letter you mention that it would have helped you to have some holy pictures or the like which would be attractive to your little charges. Well, I got you some trifle, though of poorer quality than I would have wished; but my agent could find nothing better.

You are fortunate, since perhaps you will lead to God many of those little ones so dear to the Lord. And it can be said of these that, just as in our Lord's words it is a terrible thing to harm them by giving scandal, so (I believe) it must be equally meritorious and full of hope to give them help through loving teachings. In Milan there are many valuable 'oratories' for young people, to which I have been in the habit of going on every feast-day when I could, but (to tell the truth) rather to learn than to teach. However I did give little talks and spiritual conferences when I was asked to do so. But you may well say to me: 'although you take such pleasure in the exercises which the care of souls involves, yet the Lord has not so far called you to this sublime ministry.' I understand well and am inwardly persuaded that it is with good reason that the Lord (so to speak) keeps me a few paces away from his inner sanctuary — as it seems to me the pastoral ministry can be called. Certainly I do not wish for (or I do not want to wish for) anything other than his divine will. And how can I desire other things, apart from serving the Lord my God in the manner in which he wants to be served by me? *Quid enim mihi est in coelo? Et a te quid volui super terram?* I 'Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire other than you.' I should be most happy if I once managed to be a faithful servant of his, and not the base and disloyal man that now I am. It seems to me, unless I deceive myself, that I am quite indifferent to the sort of service the Lord wants of me — whether it is lowly, abject and mean, or great and demanding; it all, yes, all seems the same to me... provided only that I once arrive at being a good and faithful servant Oh, my dear friend and brother in the Lord, pray insistently to obtain this grace for me from him. There is nothing, absolutely nothing else that I wish for...

Pray for your friend and fellow-priest,

A. R.



## 15. To Don Giulio Todeschi at Rovereto

Milan, 4 February 1827

My dear friend,

Here I am, immersed in my studies. I thank God who gives me the energy for this. Each day I understand better what is the divine will for me; and to conform to it I must stay here for some time yet But how delightful it would be if I were able to discuss matters with my good friends — with my good Giulio!

I beg you earnestly to recommend me in your prayers to the Lord. Oh, if only I had a spark of that fervour which you speak about in your letter! Or even if I had drawn profit from the recent feast of Christmas, when Jesus came to visit us! If my heart were not harder than stone, then certainly (as you say) I should have been bound to feel consumed with sorrow for my sins, and with gratitude for the goodness of God. But I am afraid it was not like that, my dear Giulio: instead I am just the same as before, or even worse. *Non peccator, sed peccatum sum*. [I am not so much a sinner: rather, sin itself.] The only comfort I can find is in the thought that it is the depth of our wretchedness which most causes the divine mercy to shine out God will not deprive himself of the great glory of *suscitare ex lapidibus filios Abrahae* [raising up children of Abraham from the very stones ]. Dear Giulio, let us join forces and pray, pray; let us detach ourselves from all earthly things and begin to live as we shall wish to have lived when we come to the end of our lives. What happiness it would be, to live on earth as if we were in heaven, and to be able to say: *nostra autem conversatio in coelis est* (Our conversation is in heaven). How content we should be if only we could hope that Christ lives in us: *vivo ego, iam non ego: vivit vera in me Christus* [It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me]. This is the goal of all my desires. But what afflicts me is the thought that I am so far away from this: how often I rebel against divine grace!

I embrace you in the Lord. I am scribbling in such haste that my writing is barely legible. Forgive me for this, and also because other occupations are calling me away. Goodbye. Let us love one another in God.

Yours,

R.

## 16. To Don Pietro Orsi at Rovereto

Milan, 6 February 1827

My dear friend,

I am sorry to hear that you are not too well. For goodness' sake look after yourself, and especially avoid damp and cold weather, which is most harmful in cases of rheumatic troubles.

For the rest, the articles in the *Biblioteca Italiana* do not cause me any great distress. You know me well: it is not my nature to be at all put out by such things... Is it perhaps a matter of an opinion which detracts from my moral honour? Which makes me out to be a wicked man? Not at all. It is only an opinion which is unfavourable to my understanding and my knowledge. Now I want you to know, my dear friend, that as regards that kind of honour, I long ago renounced it — long ago, and not just recently. I have come to understand that this is a ridiculous sort of vanity [i.e. to be touchy about such matters]. I neither care about such honour nor desire it. Rather, I wish for the contrary — so that I may not one day have to hear the words *recepisti mercedem tuam* [you have received your reward]. Perhaps you may find it difficult to believe this of me; yet I assure you that this attitude is dear to me: it obtains and rules in the depths of my soul; and if I do not show it to everyone, it is because people in general do not really credit it, so that to come out with it might seem an affectation or a refined kind of pride. God grant that I may always remain of the same mind! Hence you must consider whether [in the light of this] the article could have caused me the slightest disturbance of mind. Moreover, since I have begun: suppose that literary honour were a thing of great moment, do you imagine that the article in the *Biblioteca Italiana* could lessen it or increase it? Not at all. Where there is genuine merit, it is soon discovered — first by the learned, and then by everyone else. So, my dear friend, should one allow oneself to be offended in the slightest by this sort of thing? Certainly not. Truth will come to light. This is as certain as that the sun will rise. Now, if there were any worth, any deserving, in me; and if literary honour were something to be valued, then as I say, it would still be pointless to concern oneself about it, because true merit always wins the day in the end. And if on the contrary there is nothing of merit in me, then what a fault it would be if I were to attribute any to myself... how blameworthy it would be to arrogate to oneself an undeserved honour. With the help of divine grace, I will never do any such thing. Yes, certainly, I will defend the truth, should the need arise — but not myself. Rather, I will sacrifice myself for the sake of truth. Others are judges of me as a person.

Goodbye. Look after yourself, and give my greetings to all my friends.

Yours,

Rosmini

## 17. To Prof. Bartolomeo Stofella at Rovereto

Milan, 9 February 1827

My dear friend,

I have seen the Appendix which you undertook for Mazzetti, and I was very glad about it, because it is something of value for our country and honourable on your part — or if you like to exchange the adjectives — it makes for the honour of Italy and is a valuable achievement of yours. I would certainly encourage you to correspond with your adversaries in love, as you are well able to do if you so wish. I especially praise you for your feelings of equity, of justice, of kindness and magnanimity too, which you want to show and to foster in this undertaking. This is the way to overcome your enemies, or rather to bring them to nothing. Is it not true that an enemy is destroyed, annihilated, when after all animosity has vanished, the same person becomes only a friend? But that apart, what pleasure can be greater than that which comes of rejoicing in and loving without limit, with all passion and prejudice set aside, truth and justice? Truth is ever beautiful, whether in the mouth of friend or enemy. I would almost go so far as to say that when one knows how to savour truth in the words of an enemy, it sends forth a new sort of fragrance, giving a yet more exquisite and lovely pleasure. But how many can understand this pleasure, all exquisite, all spiritual? Only those sensitive and lofty souls endowed with the subtle and powerful senses of the spirit can perceive what is non-existent for the great mass of the rank and file. If you follow these thoughts of yours, you will not only obtain personal satisfaction, but in addition you will gain true merit in the sight of God.

Goodbye, my friend. Keep me in your love.

In all haste,

Yours,

Rosmini

## 18. To Cardinal Cappellari in Rome

Milan, 25 March 1827

[In this long letter Rosmini explains more fully the plan of the 'Priests of Charity' — the plan which he had already sent in brief form to the Cardinal — and he replies to Cappellari's observations.]

... the immediate aim of the projected Institute is not so much to urge the faithful who join it to undertake new and great things, but rather to lead them to carry out well the duties that are incumbent on every Christian by reason of his state. The religious vows, both by their own nature and also in the particular intention of the Institute, are considered simply as helps in carrying out well the obligations which each one already has. So the whole Society, I might say, is a system of means to this end.

With these considerations in mind — and they represent the final expression of the spirit of the Institute — I will go on to clarify the matters dealt with in each of the four paragraphs of your much appreciated letter.

First, you speak of the vastness of the plan — and I confess that from one point of view it is vast. But on the other hand, it is greatly limited. The 'vastness' of the Institute is of a negative character: in other words, of itself it sets no limits to doing whatever promotes the glory of God and the good of our neighbour. In this sense it does not, willingly or by the nature of its foundation, recognize any constraint. And so in this way it may seem to be vast. But this does not mean that it aims to take on everything, carry out everything, that it could do — all that it is not impeded from doing. Instead, when it comes to actually taking on any work for the glory of God or out of charity, it is really more restricted than any other institute. Because other religious societies take on themselves what they propose to do, without in any way being called upon by their neighbour; whereas the Fathers of Charity, properly speaking propose nothing, take on nothing, apart from their own sanctification, unless they are asked by their neighbour to undertake some charitable work. In this case they assume it with the necessary prudence (being obliged by their Constitutions always to act in this way), and only when in the judgement of their superiors their resources are equal to the work proposed.

So the Fathers of Charity are in the same position as every one of the faithful who wants to sanctify himself. Of himself he sets no limits to what he will do, and all good works are in this sense possible. But he will exercise judgement in taking them on, and will follow the guidance of his spiritual director. This is the situation of a member of the Fathers of Charity, though with this difference: that he will work at his spiritual formation so that he can extend his charity as far as possible when the Lord gives him occasion to do so. There are thus two special characteristics of the Institute: first, it does not commit itself to

every act of charity towards God and its neighbour — in the sense of wanting to take them all on at once; but at the same time it does not set any limits in the matter, or allow itself to be held back so as to be unable to take on whatever it may be called upon to do by God. And the second characteristic consists in not positively embracing anything to do with the active life, but gently changing over to it according to particular manifestations of the divine will — at such times, that is, as when it is presented with occasions of exercising charity and, according to a prudent judgement, it seems proper to accept these.

Your second paragraph raises two difficulties: the relation between the active and the contemplative life, so that there may be no conflict between them; and the second, as regards the vow of poverty.

What I have already said may, partly at least, have resolved the first difficulty, since the contemplative life is chosen by preference, where our neighbour does not enter into the situation; and we only change over to activity at the request of our neighbour. In such a case the contemplative life is in part abandoned for motives of charity. In this way we leave God for God, to find God. So the regulating principle governing the two modes of life, it could be said, is the greater spiritual good of the members of the Institute themselves, as discerned by the judgement of superiors. From this it is clear that the spirit of the Institute implies that the main characteristic of its superiors is that they are in effect the spiritual fathers of their subjects. And in passing, it can also be inferred that the superiors, far from being able to do just what they like with their subjects, are rather bound and restricted by the Constitutions in such a way that they can command nothing unless they first judge that what they command is for the greater spiritual benefit of those they command. This is because the love of their subjects and care for their sanctification is the main and immediate reason for their authority. In this connection I enclose herewith the paper entitled *Brevis descriptio societatis a caritate nuncupatae* [A brief description of the Society of Charity].

As regards the vow of poverty, the idea would be for the religious to retain the radical dominion over their temporal goods (I believe it is the same with the Jesuits); but they would vest in their superiors the actual right to dispose of these as they wish. What would be unusual about the vow of poverty, however, would be that the Institute itself would be essentially poor, could possess nothing, and would really never possess anything. As for the temporal goods necessary for its life, there would be a separation between the radical dominion and the right to exercise this: the former would belong to the individual religious; the latter to the superiors. The radical dominion, though, would be retained in such a way that vis-à-vis the civil law a member of the Institute would appear to be a proprietor just like any other citizen; and the vow which obliged him to leave to his superior the disposal of his goods would be a simple and private one — that is, something solely between him and his superior. In this way there would be nothing absurd in its remaining secret, as is the case

with any other private arrangement, which does not become public knowledge by its nature, but only by accident. The spirit of the Congregation, then, is certainly one which aims as far as possible to avoid any litigation; but should it not be possible entirely to avoid this, then the member [legally] possessing the goods would certainly have to be represented in the same way as are the Congregations as legal entities in other institutes, and the Church itself as regards its possessions; the legal expenses would have to be met by the subject whose goods were involved in the matter. The drawbacks of this arrangement are offset by the hope of thereby avoiding such other problems as could occur in secular States, as it is easy to see.

Your third paragraph, apart from the comments on the vow of poverty (to which I have replied), does not approve of the idea of the priests living on their own means, because this would result in the Congregation having few members, whereas the immense field it embraces would require a large number.

It would seem that this observation depends on the belief that the Congregation positively wishes to take on everything that is not beyond its limits — which, if it were the case, would call for subjects *ad infinitum*. But on the contrary, the Congregation does not undertake anything, and simply sets itself up in a state of profound recollection, seclusion, prayer and study. The functions of the active life are 'accidental', so to speak, for it — or at least contingent, and when occasions inviting action occur, it is not obliged to accept any but those that it finds suitable to the forces it disposes of. If the Lord sends it many subjects, it will accomplish more; if it has only few, it will accomplish less. And it will be governed by the law of the holy Tobias: *you must undertake merciful actions as far as you can*. And the Lord will be content with the service that will be joyfully given him, even when it is small, when greater cannot be offered. On the other hand, as I said, the spirit and intention of the Congregation is not one of doing much, but of doing well [what it can]. All the same, I am confident that God, should he so please, will not fail to provide for it; and in this connection I would add that since the pastoral ministry is in no way opposed to the spirit of the Congregation, that will contribute greatly to helping it in its temporal needs.

In your fourth paragraph, as well as remarking on the vastness of the plan (and of this I have spoken), you comment on the extent of the vow of obedience and reflect on this, comparing it with what is done in other institutes, and you suggest that since their holy founders thought it necessary to open a special school for each branch of charity, you question how it will be with an institute which embraces all of them.

The extensiveness of the vow of obedience might certainly give occasion to some fear if the superiors could arbitrarily impose anything they wished on their subjects as commands; but this is not so. And if it is true that the power of superiors is extensive (in the same way as the Institute itself is extensive,

since it does not rule out any possible object over which charity may be exercised), it is at the same time restricted in the same way that the Institute is restricted — since the Congregation does not intend to take on any office of charity without first pondering over it in conformity with the rules of prudence; and this is the basis of the Constitutions which would have to be laid down. Hence (as I have said) the first characteristic of the superior would be that he is the spiritual father of his subjects, and has as his principal office and duty to look into their capacities — not simply their gifts — and especially their spirit, so as to see what burdens they are able to bear. In addition to this general limitation, the Rules and Constitutions direct the superior, establishing the main lines on which priority is to be given to the various offices of charity, and determining which are to be regarded as preferable. Then too, the superior is helped by assistants and is under the authority of his own superiors; until, supposing that the Institute has already become extended, the line would continue up to the Superior General, whose power would be no greater than that of the General of the Jesuits, and would finish in the Roman Pontiff, with whom the Congregation would wish to have the closest possible union. To this must be added the counterpoise of all that the spirit of the Institute provides in the way of preparation; since the noviciate would be long and rigorous; and the classification of the members composing the Congregation would allow for a great deal of preparation, and the testing of those who would be destined to become superiors in it. The manner of classing the members is explained in the *Brevis descriptio* which I am including with this letter, since it is necessary that you should take it into account. It may be said that despite all the tests, the exercises, the rigour of the noviciate, the internal discipline, the length of the course of studies, and all the methods of preparation which the Institute means to make use of; despite the careful discrimination over receiving aspiring members and the ease with which the unsuitable can be excluded, the Institute can still never be insured against human malice and human weakness; and so it may happen that people who have been tested, and who over a long period have shown favourable signs, may in time show themselves to be recalcitrant and lacking in docility, and so will upset the harmony of the Institute. Yet apart from the fact that defects of this kind are inevitable, and are to be found in every other congregation, this Institute would have a provision of its own, through which it would always be able to purge itself and get rid of anything within it of a harmful nature without making it obvious, without unduly offending those who did not sufficiently come up to its ideals; since the superior can find for them a place outside it. And this is precisely because it is not of the essence of the Congregation that all its members should live permanently together; there is nothing repugnant to its nature if some member is for a good reason posted outside the Institute, without ceasing to be a member of it. This provision does not apply to any who are perverse or persistent offenders (this is another kind of problem entirely), but rather to members who might be found to be insufficiently fervent or perfect (as befits those who live in its midst) and who constitute those from whom perhaps

religious institutes generally have most to fear. This procedure is made the more possible in that each member has the means to support himself. It follows that although the Institute sets itself to lead its members to great perfection, to complete indifference and continual self-sacrifice, if it believes that it has not succeeded in this, it does not admit those who fall short in such things, either as priests of the Society or as coadjutors; none the less, if it should find itself deceived in this matter and to have mistakenly taken into its midst some who were worthy only in appearance, it would still have a means of remedying the situation — by placing them in an external post which would not call for the great perfection which it ardently desires to see in all its members. Hence the fact that it does not place limitations on its activities carries with it the advantage that it can more easily be all things to all men, and measure the burden it places on its members according to their strength — since the promises of those who enter this Society extend no further than carrying out the will of the superior, who is himself governed by the regulations laid down.

Finally, with regard to the last difficulty — that of giving an adequate training to the members in many branches of charity: this too depends on the supposition that it is intended to embrace completely a great many works. Yet the Congregation is bound only to do what it can, and will undertake no task that it cannot carry out well. So one of its main rules must be that of persevering firmly in any one type of charitable work that it takes on, and of not lightly accepting another. And if it is faced with the choice of either taking an opportunity to improve something that it has already undertaken or to begin something new, it must always (other things being equal) keep to its first commitment.

I beg your Eminence to consider all this and to enlighten me as you think necessary. You are the only person in whom I have fully confided. The nature of the project is such that I am very cautious about opening my mind to others, since it is hard to find people suitable to judge of the plan.

Finally, I am sending with this a book which may help to throw light on the spirit that should animate this Institute, should this be the will of God. Its title is *Trasunto delle massime principali* etc. [Summary of principal maxims etc. ] ...

Your most humble and grateful servant,

Antonio Rosmini



## 19. To Don Giuseppe Brunati at Brescia

Milan, 3 April 1827

[In the first part of this letter Rosmini congratulates his friend on his decision to join the Society of Jesus and reveals that he too plans to enter religious life, though not as a Jesuit, much as he esteems that Order. He confesses that he feels a different calling and promises to say more about this when they meet face to face. He rejoices that they will both be serving the same Master, Christ.]

... You want to know my opinion about the duty of submitting one's own judgement entirely to that of another, as is the practice in the Society of Jesus. St Ignatius knew what strength would be given to his Order by bringing about the greatest possible uniformity in everything, and so the greatest consensus in teachings. I do not deny that this can give rise to situations which may be difficult to resolve. All the same, generally speaking, the submission of our mind is the first requirement in a good religious. The other virtues, even heroic ones, would avail him little if he were incapable of this sort of self-mastery, and of sacrificing his own views to the authority of superiors. It is this which preserves unity and harmony in a body made up of many members. Again, there is nothing impossible about so acting in ordinary cases ; because it usually happens that the things that are argued about are not self-evident. In such instances it is only self-love which makes us assert our own view as certain, rather than have any doubts about it. If ever we do have doubts about our own opinion, it is no longer difficult to adopt that of someone else, giving it preference over our own. This surely comes naturally to anyone who genuinely has a humble opinion of himself.

I must confess though that there could be grave problems over this in two cases (though it seems to me that they very rarely occur). The first is this: if as regards the view I hold — even when I have put aside all self-love — there is hard evidence for its truth (of the sort that is found in a mathematical proof); and second, if I find that the opinion I am required to accept is self-evidently false; in these two cases it would be impossible to give an internal assent — indeed one ought not to do so — and one must continue to hold one's own view, though without upsetting the community, when one is unable to persuade superiors to change their mind. But for the rest, such cases (as I have said) are extremely rare, and it is nearly always our self-love which gives to our own views a greater degree of certainty than they really deserve. A man who has really become humble and made himself 'a fool for Christ's sake' will come across the sorts of situation I have described very seldom. But such an eventuality is not altogether impossible, and I have to admit that it would present a quandary. I do not know how the Jesuits at present act in this regard, but I hope they do not feel obliged to accept the teachings of Molina,

or any other lax moralist. No, I do not believe that they do — rather I am sure that they act with great prudence.

There is no more I can say to you about this sort of thing. Simply, a religious should always be very ready to put aside his own opinion and adopt that of someone else. But along with his deep humility and sincere self-abasement he must preserve a sensitive and unshakeable love of truth, in obedience and charity. Goodbye, my dear friend, and continue to love me.

Yours,

Antonio

## 20. To Don Giuseppe Brunati at Brescia

Milan, 4 May 1827

My dear friend,

What you say about solving the difficult case in which one's duty of obedience clashes with one's duty to the truth strikes me as excellent And what you add is especially true: that we must trust that the Lord will not allow such a conflict to occur. This is undoubtedly sound reasoning which cannot deceive us. Only confidence in God can see us through many things in which, without this trust, we should find ourselves always uncertain and wavering. Jesus Christ has shown us that we all need to place ourselves in God's hands — among other occasions, when he taught us to pray: *Et ne nos inducas in tentationem* [Lead us not into temptation]. Only God can preserve us from those trials in which even the strongest virtue can be put in danger: trials which are found not only in religion but much more in the world. This is why we read of Christ: *Angels suis mandavit de te, ut custodiant te in omnibus viis tuis* [He has given his angels charge of thee, to guard thee in all thy ways]. And it is the same with all who are united with Christ and put all their trust in him. In our journey through this world we do not know whether we are going to meet with dangers and difficulties or whether our way will be easy and straightforward. It is only our trust in God that can keep us tranquil amid the constant uncertainties and dangers; and this thought, it seems to me, should dispel all clouds of doubt in the matter we are discussing.

For the rest, the directive of St Ignatius is not as absolute as is perhaps assumed; since after pronouncing it, he adds the limiting phrase: *quoad eius fieri poterit* [as far as this is possible]. Thus in Chapter I of Part III, when speaking of keeping the novices engaged in things useful for their souls and conducive to virtue, he says: *idem sapiamus, idem, quoad eius fieri possit, dicamus iuxta Apostolum* [Let us all think alike and be one in what we say, as far as this is possible, according to the Apostle] So too in the last Chapter of the Constitutions, where he is teaching how to preserve and develop the whole body of the Society, he refers to agreement in doctrine — but always with the same phrase: 'as far as possible'. And although it is true that this moderation would go for nothing if superiors were excessively severe, as I said, through the Lord's mercy we have no reason to fear that we shall meet with this kind of superior; and even if he were to permit such a danger, it is certain that he would provide anyone who trusted in him with a means of escape from it. Finally, I believe that there is no cause for hesitation over entering religion: for this is a step greatly pleasing to God, who never allows himself to be outdone in generosity.

As regards your thought concerning the Benedictines, I cannot really say more than that you need to reflect and pray over it at great length. I have been very

taken with the last article of Part II of the *Summa* of St Thomas, which I find very comforting, because in it he proves that when it is a question of whether or not to enter religion, there is no need to consult over it, even with one's friends, because it is something so evidently good that it does not call for asking advice. Still, advice is needed in order to know how to choose from among the various religious institutes, to find which one is best suited to oneself. You would do well to read this article, which seems to me to be full of the spirit of God, and will comfort you as much as it has comforted me. For the rest, do not let yourself be moved by either an inclination towards or an aversion from any particular thing or duty. You do not think you are cut out for preaching or hearing confessions? Let yourself be guided by your superiors; and on your part keep your mind in a state of perfect indifference towards everything; be ready to preach, to hear confessions, to do whatever you are least drawn to by nature, or at least inclined to by habit. In my opinion the first and main requisite, if we are to know the will of God and make a wise choice, is to keep oneself in a state of entire and perfect indifference towards everything. How admirable is this indifference, so much recommended by the saints! This is the virtue that removes all that could block out the divine light; only through it can our hearts hear the gentle voice of the Lord. Recommend me to him.

Yours,

R.

## 21. To Don G. B. Loewenbruck

Milan, 25 June 1827

Your enthusiasm, my dear brother in Christ, consoles and strengthens me, and I take it as a further sign of the Lord's will. As I wrote to you, I am already prepared. However, we cannot immediately get together: several things must happen first, and the two main ones are these: first, we have to test our resolve in prayer before the Lord for a little longer, as well as by exchanging letters, to make sure that we are of one mind, and that it is the same spirit that is calling us both. Secondly, we must have the blessing of the Holy Father, so that right from the start we are thoroughly incorporated in the Church — something that is essentially required by the nature of the Institute. So in the meantime, while these things are in train, we shall be together in spirit if not in body; and we shall ask the God of mercies to bring us together if, when, and as this accords with his adorable will.

For the present, let us continue to correspond. This will prepare the way for the Constitutions which we shall compose together as soon as we can meet in the Lord.

The difficulties which paragraph 12 presents, and which you have well brought out, are mainly two: the harm that would result should the superior of the Society, if he were also engaged in pastoral work, grow cold in charity and give a bad example; and secondly, the ease with which this might happen, since his love would have to be divided between the Society and his flock. Because of this, he would be exposed to the danger of either neglecting the Society for the sake of his flock, or the flock for the sake of the Society.

I hope that if I express myself more clearly over what I meant in 12, both these difficulties will disappear.

With regard to the first, it needs to be noticed that a particular characteristic of the Society in taking on works of charity must be a mature prudence; and the Constitutions must enjoin this prudence on superiors. And the reason why such prudence must have a special place in the Society we are thinking about is that it is not limited to one particular sort of charity. Without restricting itself to any one, it decides on this or that as superiors judge best; and this is why it is upon the prudence of superiors, guided by the rules laid down, that the successful outcome of the Society's exertions depends. So the Society is not obliged beforehand to take on pastoral work as a regular feature: it will only assume such work, with mature circumspection, in cases where the superior, with whom the responsibility lies, prudently judges it to be opportune. These will be cases where the Society has a man to whom can be entrusted without risk, and with the moral certainty of a good outcome, the double responsibility of pastor and superior. As long as the Society has no such man, or as long as the

superior (to whom it would belong to commission him) judges in conscience that he has no one suitable, it is not obliged to take on pastoral duties — indeed it is obliged not to assume them. But notice that it is not impossible that the Society should come to have such men, when we take into account such things as the long preparation which its members must undergo; the long noviciate and period of studies; then the life of recollection, of silence and of discipline which must go on within the Society; and finally the distinction between the presbyters and the coadjutors. This distinction means that only persons of excellent qualities will be admitted to the highest grade [that of presbyters]; hence it must be laid down in the Constitutions that the superiors of the Society and the pastors are to be chosen only from them. Besides this, I propose that the Constitutions should establish that the pastoral office may only be given to a man at least thirty years old. By then it can be hoped that through his training within the Society he will be well-formed; and the best of these formed and mature men can be supposed to be equal to taking on the double office of superior and pastor, with the aid of divine mercy. In the light of the maturity and caution [I have described], you will recognize that the government of the Society depends on two main maxims: first, that the superiors of the Society must work with full liberty according to the rules, as they judge in conscience before the Lord, without pressure from any outside authority or influence; and the second is this: that the Society is intent not on doing great things but on doing well what little it is capable of. Hence it must not do anything that overstretches it, and should assume only such tasks as are within its powers. The Lord is generous and liberal, and the Society must believe that he will supply it abundantly with the means to do what he wants of it. If in a particular case these means are not available, that shows that it is not his will that the work should be taken on.

As regards the second difficulty: that the superior who is also a pastor may be in danger of neglecting either the Society or his flock my answer is this: as regards the love which the superior has for his religious Institute, he may fall into one or other of two extremes; he may err by defect or excess. There may be defect but this is obviated by the various rules which are intended to foster love for our Institute; and nothing is more wonderfully calculated to bring this about than the rules of St Ignatius. There is also the disorder that springs from excess. There can be no such thing as an excessive love for a religious Institute *qua talis*, because in itself it is infinitely lovable, and the more perfect a religious is, the more he loves his institute. The excess, then, which constitutes a disorder is in relation to the Church. That is, the religious loves his institute too much when he loves it more than the Church, or when his love for it does not observe due order in relation to the Church. This can easily happen without the religious himself being aware of it; because this fault is always cloaked with an appearance of holiness. This is how it comes about that the world reproaches religious Orders with showing what is called *esprit de corps*. And this corrupts them, transforms them in the course of time into so

many sects which, instead of devoting themselves to procuring the general good of the Church, even at some sacrifice to themselves, finish up by putting first the aim of benefiting themselves. This blameworthiness is exaggerated by the world and made out to be far greater than it really is; but it remains that there is a certain amount of truth in the charge. So this defect is one that must be much lamented by all those who love the Church above all else, and who *dominicus lucris gaudent et damnis moerent* [rejoice in the Lord's gains and grieve over whatever harms him.] It is only the Church of Jesus Christ that can never be loved too much, either relatively or absolutely; for the Church is that sheepfold, that flock, for which the Man-God shed his blood, and of which he said that the Good Shepherd *gives his life for his sheep*. A religious, then, should love his institute for the sake of the love he bears the Church of Jesus Christ the love that the shepherd has for his flock — those sheep that belong to the sheepfold of Jesus Christ. It is this love which regulates the way the religious ought to love his institute. If he acts in this way, he will never have an inordinate love for his own institute, so as really to love himself in the society to which he belongs. He will never separate himself from the charity of Christ so as to pursue his own interests; rather, incorporated in the Prince of Pastors, he will love his congregation in the Church of Christ, in his sheepfold, in his sheep. This is the reason why, in those houses that have taken on pastoral work, the superior of the community must also be the pastor; because it is through this uniting of the two offices in one person that a balance is reached between love for the Society and love for the Church, so that they obey the proper order of things. So the superior of the Society can be compared to Abraham, who acknowledges Agar as a servant precisely because he also has Sarah for his wife. It was the freewoman who brought the servant to the holy patriarch so that he might have children by her. But Abraham did not choose the servant as his spouse. If he had married only Agar, she would have become the mistress of the house; but because he had Sarah already, Agar was kept in her natural subjection and servitude, and was even dismissed when Ishmael could not live with Isaac. So the pastor who is also a religious recognizes the Church as his spouse and the society as the servant who is always kept in subjection to the mistress of the house. All religious institutes must be servants of the Church. As long as this is so, they cease to be man's work and become the work of God — that is, of Christ, who is the Founder of the Church. This principle must prevail especially in a society that aims to train holy priests, and is always dependent on the authority of the Church, so that the Spouse of Christ may never have need of a body that she herself does not take into her bosom and control.

You will notice that there is nothing new in this notion. Rather, it was always the spirit and the wish of the Church. St Augustine, as a bishop, led a life in community, and was the superior of the religious whom he had founded, according to the same principle. St Eusebius of Vercelli also founded a similar body in the West, and we read of him: 'he was the first to establish in the

Western Church monks who were also priests; so that these men combined contempt of worldly goods with pastoral care.' You know already that in those days clerics were attached to churches either as pastors or as assistants to pastors. Later on another bishop, St Norbert, had the same object in view when he founded his Premonstratensian Canons — so that this body was more than once established or revived by holy men in the Church in various places. I admit that it would be difficult to maintain for any length of time as a general rule that all parish priests without exception should be religious, or vice-versa, that all religious superiors should be pastors; and perhaps because the rule was too general, the custom could not be kept up for long in the Church. And this is precisely why within our own Institute there is no obligation to make this a general arrangement. Instead, it is laid down that only in particular cases will this happen — cases where the prudence of superiors may judge that a certain member of the Society may be given the dual duty with a moral certainty that this will have a successful outcome. So gradually in the course of time, in accordance with the will of God (to whom it belongs to send men suitable for such difficult duties), there will be brought about that restoration within the Church which seems to be desirable, and for which we can but pray to its divine Head.

Even though the love of the religious is partly directed outside the Society and given to the flock of Christ, this does not mean that the Congregation will suffer. This is not to be feared — first, because the Lord himself, for whose sheep the work is done, will see to this; then because anyone who loves the Lord's flock and works for their good can do no other than love the Society in so far as it is a means for their salvation. And finally, because the internal hierarchy of the Society will always have at its head a Superior General who is himself the servant of the Supreme Pastor of the Church; and it is upon him that the whole well-being of the Congregation ultimately depends.

In this way the Society will the more readily be able to keep itself humble, since it is sure to happen that one of its main activities will be the giving of the Spiritual Exercises to the secular clergy; which in effect means that it will be the teacher of the Church's pastors themselves. There would be a great danger of vainglory if it were made up simply of priests who were not pastors; for when those who are in an inferior position are obliged to teach their superiors, it is always very difficult to ensure that they are not tempted to feel proud. They may even feel that they cannot speak freely, in case they overstep the bounds of modesty. But it will be quite a different situation if the one who does the preaching has a special mission from Jesus Christ, and himself has the dignity of exercising pastoral care. And even if those who give the retreat are not themselves pastors, it is still an advantage that they belong to a body in which some do have that position, rather than to a society made up simply of priests.

Lastly, let us hope in Jesus Christ: confine ourselves to the mission he gives us — a mission which inspires us with courage, and from which we can look for



grace and strength. It is this mission which gives such dignity to the Church's pastors; which makes them almost more than mere men ... and are we to neglect it? Will religious have less reason to put their trust in their superior when he is one who has received such a mission as a parish priest? Will he not bear a more lifelike resemblance to Jesus Christ? Will the Society not be able to hope for a more intimate union with its Lord?

Write to me about this, I beg you, once you have communed intimately with the Lord. See if these arguments do not impress you as much as they have impressed me. You will appreciate that this union of the pastoral office with that of superior within the Society is a characteristic of the Institute that I have long had before my mind. If this feature were taken away from it, it would no longer be the Institute in all its perfection but something quite other...

Affectionately yours,

A. R.

## 22. To Don G. B. Loewenbruck at Domodossola

Milan, 6 July 1827

My dear friend and brother in Jesus Christ,

I have already written you a long letter but I do not know if you have yet received it. In it I resolved the difficulty you put to me, and I have every confidence that we shall be of one mind in the Lord. It is in this trust that I am writing to you now to propose a more definite arrangement. You are quite right: 'The Spirit of God brooks no delay'. But forgive my natural tendency to coldness and tardiness (may it never earn me blame). My present plan is this: quite soon — within a month I hope — I shall be with you. This will be just a short visit, to see you, to view the place, to reach agreement, to make our preparations. Next Lent I shall come permanently to Domodossola. On 20 February, Ash Wednesday, we shall fast together, pray together; Jesus will be our model right from the beginning of this enterprise — which he alone can carry out and bring to perfection. I may bring a companion with me, so that we shall be able to comfort and sustain one another with the words: *Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them*. What a blessed solitude this mountain retreat will afford us, united in the fast and prayer of the Lord! He will indeed be in the midst of us with his Spirit, who will teach us all things and bring to our minds all that we heard before, through the Church — things that would remain dead and forgotten if they were not brought to life by the Paraclete whom the Father will send in the name of the Son. This Lent will be the time for the writing of the Constitutions 'according to the pattern which will be shown to us on the mountain.' If the time is insufficient, we can carry on with the work until Pentecost. The Lord has already revealed many things to me: you will examine them and test whether they are truly from God. I should be an 'unfaithful servant' if I said anything else, or deviated from God's will in what I do.

If I proceed very slowly in these matters it is not just through my coldness; it is also out of this fear: I wish neither to anticipate nor to delay in following God's will. But I am almost more afraid of the first defect than of the second. On the other hand, the Lord is good, and he has repeated his calls to his saints as often as three times, and has spurred them on in ways that made it too difficult for them to refuse. He who gave speech to men knows how to speak, and he who makes children eloquent habitually speaks clearly and with power.

The time remaining before 20 February — more than seven months — must be spent by us in welcoming the voice of the Lord and in making our holy vocation even more certain. I still have to dispose of some of my temporal affairs. You could give some of the time to the study of Italian, so that we shall be able to understand each other the more easily. Let us love one another in the Lord.

All that I have written is based on the expectation of receiving from my ecclesiastical superiors permission to carry out what I have described, as I said in my previous letter. May Jesus Christ be praised to all eternity. Amen.

Your affectionate brother,

A. R.

### 23. To Leonardo de' Rosmini<sup>11</sup> at Trent

Milan, 5 August 1827

My dear friend,

I cannot possibly forget how much I owe you, unless I take leave of my senses, or the Lord's hand abandons me to the most culpable ingratitude. I would rather die than be guilty of that. So I will carry in my soul to the tomb the memory of those first seeds of piety that, when we were both young, indeed when I was but a child, you instilled into me. For when you took me with you to church and made me recite the prayers with you, what I did at first was done simply to please my friend; but afterwards I did it for the love of God and for my eternal salvation. And habit made light the burden of praying, so that soon I found great sweetness in it and experienced the fruit of it. And these were the beginnings of all the graces which later the Lord lavished on me — graces for which I cannot thank him sufficiently. I say these things so that you can see how impossible it would be for me to be lacking in love for the one to whom I owe such great benefits, and so that in future you will not measure my love by the frequency or the length of the letters I write to you. There are indeed many whom I love dearly but rarely or never write to. Moreover I act like this so that I can give more time to things useful to others rather than things that give pleasure to me.

At all events, it seems to me that a really deep and mature sort of love is one which can remain constant in the heart without the help or even the need of those outward signs which are sometimes found even in the absence of real love. If you do not happen to agree with this, at least forgive the way I see things, and rather accuse me of being fanciful in this than of being cold-hearted. For this has never been one of my vices: indeed I may have gone to the opposite extreme — though not, I think, with you. For how can there be anything excessive in a love which leads to God, and in whom alone it still burns? And this is consoling; for it is by loving one another in God that friends, even when they are far apart from one another, are always most close and united together. And this union is not brought about by talk or letters or any other sort of communication: it is entirely internal and spiritual, independent of material circumstances. When things are like this, what one loves is not the success of one's friend but himself, and that within him which is the most excellent part — his soul and his eternal salvation. This I desire for you as a token of my love: that we may be together in that place where there is no need for the letters which here below bring us so much pleasure.

Yours,

A. Rosmini

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<sup>11</sup> Leonardo Rosmini was Antonio's cousin, and a familiar friend from childhood. He led a holy and blameless life. Further evidence of the gratitude and esteem Antonio felt for his cousin can be found in No. 1812 of the E.C.

## 24. To Don Silvestro Belli in Rome

Milan, 6 August 1827

My dear friend,

Every time you speak to me about coming to Rome you put a great temptation in my mind. You know, I have always had a tremendous wish to go there, but I have likewise always resisted it. If you ask me why, well it is the result of the rule of conduct I have embraced. I should be uneasy and indeed inconsolable if I believed that I had done my own will rather than the will of God. This is why I live in a state of passivity in relation to such proposals, feeling certain that if God wants something from me, he will know how to make this clear to me in an unmistakable way. He who gave us the faculty of speech knows very well how to express himself plainly. You cannot imagine what peace and tranquillity I derive from living according to this rule. The Lord disposes of all things sweetly; and it is this sweetness that one can savour by going along with his dispositions. However, I can tell you that I am persuaded that my coming to Rome is a thing that he does intend; but I do not know yet when the time for it is to be — perhaps it will be sooner than at the moment seems likely. Let us pray, my friend, pray with one accord; and may the Church be at the centre of our thoughts. With this in mind I ask the Lord to let me die for her.

Yours affectionately,

A. R.

## 25. To Don G. B. Loewenbruck at Domodossola

Milan, 9 August 1827

My dear friend and brother in Jesus Christ,

Because your temperament is perhaps a little too enthusiastic, I fear that it makes you remiss in using the prudence that I have greatly recommended to you, and which we so much need to observe. My dear friend, let me speak to you freely, holding back nothing. It has come to my knowledge that you have been too free in revealing your hopes to 'a friend or two of yours', saying things that have no real foundation, and that (even if this were not so) it would be better to conceal. It is not that I believe you intended to deceive anyone: I know the sincerity of your spirit too well to think that. But all the same I think you have deceived yourself, by changing a mere figment of your imagination into a reality. For heaven's sake, let us be prudent and cautious, saying too little rather than too much — and this especially as regards anything favourable to our undertaking. It really is essential to realize that any words spoken or written unwisely can cause very great harm to the work that the Lord seems to want us to carry out; and we shall have to render an account to him for any such harm. Any lack of prudence on our part may earn us the name of 'unfaithful servant' — which God forbid! This matter is so close to my heart, and bears so much on — I will not say simply a happy outcome of our activities but — the very salvation of our souls, that I feel I must explain to you more clearly the spirit by which I have always wanted to regulate my own conduct, and which should be that of our Society, if it is God's good pleasure to add other friends to our company.

This spirit consists in being deeply persuaded that we are nothing, that we can do nothing, that all our natural powers are quite incapable of doing the least thing pleasing to God and of value to our own souls or those of our neighbour, much less to the increase of the Church of Jesus Christ. Jesus alone, the Head of the Church, is the one who can do everything: he has no need of anyone; and he is jealous for his own glory, to such a degree that he will certainly confound any who presume of themselves to do anything for his glory and that of his Church. A Christian who is intimately persuaded of this must not only see himself as not necessary for the divine plan, but rather must look upon himself as what he really is — *an unprofitable servant*. And given this persuasion, he must not be anxious or solicitous to do great things, or behave (when it comes to the things of God) like some *soldier of fortune*, some fanatic, as we see people behave over the things of the world when they want to make a great name for themselves. In what concerns the things of God we must act in a diametrically opposite fashion.

So as regards events in the Church we must remain entirely calm, convinced that Jesus Christ lives, that he has all power in heaven and on earth; that he

does whatever he wishes, and that nothing happens that is not ordained to his greater glory and his complete triumph. So what is there left for the Christian to do? Only to work at his own sanctification, purify his conscience, weep over his sins, confess his own weakness, recognize his nothingness, pray, be consumed by the fire of unlimited love. As for things undertaken for the benefit of his neighbour and the good of the Church, he must remain tranquil while awaiting the divine call. The Christian, while acknowledging his own nothingness and powerlessness to accomplish these things, knows besides that God can still make use of his nothingness and do with it what pleases him. And so he must wait to see if the mercy of God will condescend to make use of him as an instrument for some work of his, so that his glory may shine forth through our infirmity. As yet he knows nothing of God's dispositions and intentions in his regard, and so must wait, like our Blessed Lady, until they are made known to him: he may not anticipate God's decrees. It may be that God does not wish to make use of him; and in this case he will live in the quiet and obscurity of the normal state in which God has placed him, tranquil and content. Or it may be that the Lord does wish to make use of him, and in this case, wondering ever more at the immensity of the divine mercy, he will place himself at God's disposal, docile and unresisting, like the staff in a man's hand.

But how are we to know these divine calls, these expressions of the will of God? First through circumstances. The first rule for interpreting them is the knowledge that *God gently disposes all things*. And in the light of this rule, the Christian seeks nothing but refuses nothing; he rejects none of the opportunities of doing good that present themselves to him. So there is no violent effort of his own in his actions, because he is guided and led by circumstances. He makes sure that everything he does is done as perfectly as possible. For the rest, he makes no effort to go beyond what the circumstances of the moment invite him to do; he is not solicitous about the future. The only aim that he always has at heart, using all the powers and energies he has, is to bring about his own interior sanctification; to put himself in the hands of God, setting no limits to his grace, leaving God to do with him as he pleases. And given such a spirit, my friend, what follows? What maxims should guide our conduct? Here they are:

1. We should have only one unqualified desire: to have a pure conscience, to be just, and to live tranquil and content, resting in God's hands;
2. To do good in accordance with the present circumstances, adoring in them the mercy of God who puts them before us, and desiring nothing else, for God alone knows what is good and what is harmful for us;
3. To be indifferent as regards the future: that is, setting no limits (for our own part) to the divine goodness; putting no obstacle in the way of whatever good it may please God to have us do; and making no guesses about future things, allowing ourselves no fixed dispositions which might forestall the divine

will. Much less, then, should we give any scope to exaggerated fantasies, which even by the standards of human prudence would be considered extravagant; since this would mean that *the spirit of truth* was not at work in us, and anything opposed to this is of evil. Let us then be sincere; let us be simple in soul. *Simplicity* of spirit must always make us embrace the present good, with no thought for anything else. *Sincerity* will only permit us to speak of what we know and what God wishes us to know. Our aim is not to do 'great things' but simply those which are pleasing to God.

And if we apply all this to our project, then what are we going to do? Nothing more than make a retreat of forty days; nothing more than keep a fast together in imitation of our divine Master. This we know, or so it seems, because it is near at hand, and because the circumstances seem favourable to it. Do we know anything else? As yet nothing we can communicate to others. So let us rest content, and not talk of anything of which we are not certain. Were we to die tomorrow, we should leave nothing that was imperfect; for we are fulfilling the divine will moment by moment. If we talk of doing anything in the future, the Lord will punish us for it, because we shall have forgotten his words. Perhaps Lent will show us what else is to be done; and when the time has come to do this, that will be the time to talk about it. But let us banish far from us any human scheming, all exaggeration; there is nothing we want to accomplish by using such means; and in the meantime we want to do only that for which the Lord gives us the means. *Purge out the old leaven... let us not feast with the old leaven nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.* Let us be as simple as doves: all things are naked and open to his eyes. Let us do nothing impulsively or of our own accord; we must not let vain hopes deceive us, or anticipate the will of God, even in our desire to please him. Rather let us abandon ourselves into the hands of divine Providence, but not as if we had any right to receive what it may please his bounty to give us. Certainly his Providence is generous — it surpasses all generosity — but it is not at the service of our wishes; rather, our wishes must fall in with the merciful generosity of God.

This then is the spirit, my dear friend, which I have wanted (and still want) to conform myself to, and which will also be that of our Society, since it is common to all true Christians: a spirit which is calm, temperate, springing from charity, founded on the realization of our own nothingness.

My dear brother, we agreed (before we parted after our last conversation) that we would each suggest topics for our daily *meditation*. My proposal is precisely this spirit, which it is so important that we should thoroughly understand. I await your suggestions to me; and if you would like to add a brotherly correction over any defect you noticed in me while we were together, you will be doing me a great kindness. In the meantime, think about what I have written; and be careful over anything you say or write 'to our friends', especially as regards hopes for the future which have no foundation; for that would be



quite contrary to the spirit of truth, of simplicity, and of trust in divine Providence, and would do us no good but rather, great harm. I am sure that you will be good enough to make what I have put to you the subject of your meditations; and I hope too that you will let me know your views on these things. This correspondence will be very useful, because it will enable us to get to know one another thoroughly, and that is altogether necessary. So open your heart to me, I beg you. You are speaking to someone who greatly loves you and esteems you in the Lord — have no doubts about that Let us humble ourselves before God; and please pray to him for me, your friend, however unworthy,

A.R.

## 26. To Don G.B. Loewenbruck at Domodossola

Milan 16 August 1827

My dear friend,

We must put our trust in the Lord and conform ourselves to the maxim I spoke to you about in my previous letter (to which I anxiously await your reply). We must not take the smallest step unless it agrees with the prudence and truth of the Lord. I say again, we do not aim to do great things; and we must not be worried over the future. Let it be God who leads us, who (so to speak) urges us to make a move, so that we do not put one foot in front of the other except in the hope that it is not man, but Jesus Christ in man, who takes the initiative. We shall be blessed if we journey on with such circumspection. For we are dead to ourselves, since our lives are hid in Christ, in God. *I live now, not I, but Christ lives in me.* My dear friend whom I greatly love in the Lord, — peace, patience, endurance. We do not know what we do, not even what we are asking for. *We do not know how to pray as we should.* Where must be our trust? In what follows: *But the Spirit himself asks on our behalf, with sighs too deep for words. And again: He who searches the hearts of men knows what is in the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.* So this is what we ought to do: let the Spirit pray in us 'according to God', asking for all that makes for holiness. God will do the rest — God who scrutinizes the depths of the heart to see if it is upright. So what will he do? He will show us what we should do: he will show us how we are to act when, where, how much, according to his will. Then what we do will be done intelligently, because God will have shone his light before us; we shall not be acting of our own accord; but God will accomplish everything through us. 'To him be glory for ever. Amen.'

Yours,

Serbati

## 27. To Don G.B. Loewenbruck at Domodossola

Rovereto, 31 August 1827

My dear friend and brother in Jesus Christ,

I received your two letters only yesterday.

I have thanked the Lord that you are entirely in agreement with the ideas I put to you. This has been a fresh proof of what I already hoped, and I am very glad that my opinion of you was not mistaken. Rest assured that I love and esteem you, and I consider myself unworthy to be your servant. There is only one thing I want and long for in the Lord, and it is that we may never trust in ourselves to achieve success, or take any step of our own volition without having consulted the Lord beforehand; for *all flesh is grass, and the glory thereof as the flower of the field*.

I see from your letter that you are well aware that all of us have our faults, and I in particular. This gives me great courage and confidence, for I firmly hope that you are ready to support me and put up with my many shortcomings. I have great need of such forbearance, and I beg it of you, for the love of Christ—the more so because my habitual state is one of weakness, as I told you, and it comforts me greatly when I see my brethren giving me their support.

At present I am familiarizing myself with the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius. The more I meditate on this little book, the more it comes home to me that it is a great work; and I hope that it will be most useful to us, as it was of such value to the Company of Jesus in its early days. It has the power to lead the heart to virtue, and even to the highest perfection. If the Exercises no longer bring about the great good effects they once had, perhaps it is because the method laid down by that man of God, who had such profound insight into spiritual matters, is no longer followed as exactly as it used to be. As so often happens in all sorts of things, people try various innovations, on the assumption that they can do better. This is how it comes about that the Ignatian Exercises became enfeebled and spineless, and failed any longer to produce the certain effects that can result when the saint's own rigorous method is followed. But of this we can speak at greater length when we are together.

Love me, my dear friend, and let us persevere in the prayer by means of which we shall receive all things through Jesus Christ. My mind is always full of our union, and although my health is very weak and my ailments many, still I have no fears. The words you wrote to me are most dear: *when I am weak, then am I strong*. It is only when we feel we have nothing to hope for from ourselves that we really put our hopes in God. We need experience: the knowledge gained by the mind alone is too cold and ineffectual without that experimental knowledge

which Christ and the saints had, according to the apostle's words: *He learned obedience through the things he suffered*. May we live no longer, but may Christ live in us; and may he bring about in us all that he gives us to know, and may he give us to know all that he desires, so that the kingdom of his Father may come into our hearts.

Yours ever,

R.

## 28. To Count Giacomo Mellerio in Milan

Rovereto, 22 September 1827

My dear friend,

You very rightly call the trials and tribulations which are to be met with in life 'corrective thorns'. People who feel these thorns pricking their hands are in truth fortunate. By contrast, those who meet only with roses are unlucky. Any one who cannot feel these prickings must have dead senses, like a body with gangrene. To quote your own words: 'religion changes evil into good.' But let us thank the Lord alike for the good things and the bad. I have often thought, at times when I have felt weak and powerless, 'This is a grace which God is sending me: he makes me realize my wretched state; he makes me know from experience that I am nothing. And so he gives me great cause to humble myself, and this leads me to trust in him, to abandon myself entirely to him — since I now see that there is nothing in myself that I can rely on.' This same fear and lack of courage when faced with the demands of a life of perfection can be salutary for us if it makes us say with sincerity in our hearts: 'see how great is our weakness' ... if it makes us see clearly that, left to ourselves, we cannot advance even by a single step in the way of perfection and in contempt for earthly things, because we are here dealing with the supernatural order, in which our natural powers are helpless, and only the strength which comes from our heavenly Father avails: *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him*. This makes me realize that it is no use our trying to overcome our aversion, our natural reluctance, because we shall never succeed; and our own efforts result in nothing but a certain uneasiness, which is bad. At a time like this, the Lord wants to persuade us of a great truth: namely, that he alone effects everything in us as regards the supernatural order. We must fully recognize this fact, with joy and tranquillity. It is greatly to the glory of God when we abase ourselves before him, and know and feel our powerlessness. What is left for us to do? Only to concentrate all our efforts on the sole aim of becoming more just, of possessing justice in the highest degree, without worrying about the means by which we are to obtain it; without thinking about, without considering, how we look. We must place ourselves in God's hands, humbled like this, thirsty for justice, convinced that he is able to give us this justice in every possible way, sure that he will give it to us because he is infinitely good, because he has said so ... We must live in perfect peace and tranquillity of spirit, indifferent to how he disposes of us, and to all the means he sees fit to use to make us holy, desirous only of being sanctified. Yes, the God of all peace and consolation will gently draw to himself those who abandon themselves to him: gently, I say, when and how he pleases. It will be soon, and in the most perfect way possible, when we truly cease to put up resistance, when we are really passive, when we are dead to ourselves, genuinely persuaded of the futility of all our efforts, all our plans. This is how things are with the man

who for the love of Christ no longer thinks his own thoughts, but lets Christ think in him; who no longer acts relying on his own efforts, but lets Christ act in him. Blessed foolishness! Happy inertia! To arrive at this state when a man no longer thinks, no longer labours, is very exhausting. He can do nothing, yet it costs him a great effort to refrain from acting. Really, it seems to be the summit of our virtue, not to do evil; to be 'useless'! We have to let ourselves sink into just such an abyss of humiliation. How I wish that the Lord would make me enter this abyss, so that from such depths I could send up a prayer that would be powerful, all-powerful!

It seems likely to me that you will concur in these thoughts of mine ... that you will see them as in effect a commentary on your own letter, precious as it is to me. I will finish like St Paul: *Joy and peace*; be quiet and tranquil in the Lord — recommend me to him. Unworthy as I am, I will do the like for you.

While I was writing this I received your own of the 19th, in which I find thoughts similar to what I have said above ... It delights me to be remembered in your midst, as you tell me I shall be! I value the more your goodness towards me, the less right I have to expect it. A thousand regards to the Padulli and Somaglia families and to Polidori.

Ever yours,

A.R.

## 29. To Don G.B. Loewenbruck at Domodossola

Rovereto, 24 September 1827

My dear friend and brother in Jesus Christ,

I have received your welcome letters, but have deferred replying so as not to multiply letters without necessity. Thanks be to God for the supply of water that he has enabled us to find. I hear from you and my friend [Count Mellerio] that the men are at work. The Lord be praised.

I am still busy here over our affairs. May the Lord grant that my efforts may contribute to what is the foundation of everything — our spiritual formation. Tomorrow I shall be meeting the Bishop of Novara who is paying a visit here. Before he leaves I must ask his blessing; but this will be in strict secrecy. I am also expecting quite soon the Bishop of Treviso [Mgr Grasser], a friend of mine who has my confidence. But let our trust be in God alone. Men's favour never encourages me without at the same time causing me alarm. I should be a wretched fellow if I put my trust in men. God grant that I may die rather than put my hopes in men or in human things. I beg you to ask the Lord in your prayers for this favour: that we may put our hopes in him alone, and that we may see in external circumstances simply the signs by which he shows us his divine will, and nothing more. We must attach no importance to them in themselves, any more than to the voice or writings of a king, but only to his will as contained in them. If we act like this we shall be showing abandonment to divine Providence, and never offend by presumption or temerity. The safe rule we shall follow will be: external circumstances are signs of the divine will. And so, in the absence of these signs, we shall remain in the contemplative state; and only guided by these signs, and not of our own accord, we shall prudently make the transition to the active state, as I said in the brief Latin description of the Society. This, it seems to me, is the way to peace and tranquillity; this is the sure way either to silence the *ignorance of foolish men*, as St Peter says, or to put up cheerfully with any attacks to which we have given no occasion — and which therefore will truly be *propter iustitiam* [for the sake of justice]

Your unworthy servant and friend,

A.R.

### 30. To Don G.B. Loewenbruck at Domodossola

Rovereto, 29 September 1827

My dear friend and brother in Jesus Christ,

[In his opening paragraph Rosmini excuses himself for delaying a reply to his friend's letter, saying that he did not wish to multiply letters unnecessarily, and that to do so would increase the risk of prejudicing the secrecy of their plans. Also Loewenbruck's letter did not call for an answer. But Rosmini's silence was not to be taken as a sign of any lack of love or of his having taken offence at anything Loewenbruck had said.]

I very much wish I could be with you. That we are united in spirit I have no doubt — this must be the Lord's work. Let us trust in him alone and abandon ourselves to him without having preconceived ideas. For us, external circumstances are signs to which we must pay close attention in order to discern his will. That is our concern: to do his will, not our own; and to live in tranquillity, peace and patience. Certainly patience is needed; and Christ has taught us this virtue by his life and death.

I have given some thought to the question of furnishings. They must be in accord with the poverty that we mean to profess. So I have written some little rules to express what form I think our external poverty should take. I should like you to study these, to see whether you consider that what I have put forward is really apt for our purpose. If you approve of my suggested rules, these can guide us over the furnishing arrangements we make. The object is that everything should combine both to give edification and to show how little store we set by human comforts. Also there should be nothing that might distract our attention from being wholly occupied with the things of God, or engage the affections of our hearts, which ought to overflow with the love of God.

You will see from these few rules that I consider that we should observe the greatest poverty possible in the house and its furnishings, especially when it comes to our cells [rooms]. The principle which lies at the basis of my thought is what I have put forward in the first rule: 'It is most useful that when we look around us we should see an extreme poverty of any form of ornament, so that we may remember that naked we were born and naked we must return to Christ. At the same time there should be no lack of things that can help to instruct us and lead us to spiritual perfection.' Our nature must not be subjected to too many privations, whether voluntary or imposed by rule, simply because it has to be sacrificed in charity, and so our strength should not be diminished, but rather spent wholly in that way. This is why I said that we must not be too short of *commodities*, but only that there should be no *ornaments*. And by 'commodities' I do not mean things that can lead us to be lazy, but rather things



that can enable us to get more done. For a similar reason I do not think we should impose any general corporal austerities on ourselves; only that we should perform as well as possible those which the Church enjoins on all Christians. I leave it to individuals to do anything further, as the Spirit may suggest (though this is to be tested by the superior or confessor) — provided that this does not lead to any lessening of the strength which should be spent entirely in the love of God, expressed through the PRAYER which is an essential part of our chosen life; and again through charity towards our neighbour, and through the duties we take on at his request — these being the things that *constitute our second state*.

I will say no more now, but simply embrace you in the Lord, in whom I want us to be united, consumed by his love.

Yours,

A.R.

### 31. To Don Giuseppe Brunati In Rome

Milan, 28 November 1827

My dear friend,

The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius are truly effective in showing us what is the will of God concerning our state in life. When we put ourselves in his presence, stripped of all affections, in a state of perfect indifference to everything, and in this disposition cry out to the Lord from the depths of our hearts: *Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening*, such a plea, it seems to me, is truly one that cannot remain without a sure and ever-consoling reply. I say ever-consoling', because when we are in the state of indifference I have just described, we always gain our end when the Lord answers us. For our end can be nothing other than to know and do the will of God. And how delightful is that divine will; how delightful it is to desire it, and to love it — solely and completely, with the whole of ourselves ... to add nothing of our own affections to it, but to forget them all, to forget ourselves for the sake of that will.

I believe this is how it must have been with you, even though you have discovered that the Lord does not want you to become a Jesuit: I am quite sure that you have felt just as much consolation as if he had shown you that he wanted you to be one; and that you will have blessed him just as much, adored equally the decrees of his merciful will. It may be that it seemed somewhat strange to you, to find that when you looked into it more closely, the will of God was different from what it seemed to be originally. But let your humility support you in this temporary human anxiety; and the incident must show you how necessary it is to test, and test again, our first intentions, in the light of eternity.

I look forward to embracing you; I hope that in the fervour of your retreat you have been mindful of me, who drag myself along so slowly in the way of the Lord. Goodbye once more. I take my fond leave of you in the Lord and ask you to pray for me always.

Yours,

Rosmini

## 32. To Don Giovanni Padulli In Rome

Milan, 21 December 1827

My dear and excellent friend,

[The first paragraph deals with family matters.]

You are quite right to say that our business — or rather the Lord's business — cannot be dealt with in letters and had better wait until we can talk together. I am so persuaded of this that it seems to me also that the time draws near when I shall be able to visit Rome, the capital of the Catholic world — that beloved city which for a long time has been the object of my aspirations, the centre (it seems to me) of my hopes on earth. But these hopes should not be earthly, and please God they will not be. Meanwhile we must persevere in prayer, and I beg this of you with all the force at my command. Ask our divine Lord and our dear Mother Mary to shed their light on our darkness, to give us strength in our weakness, so that we can both know what God wants of us and accomplish this. We no longer need enlightenment from the Lord over whether we should embrace the life of perfection: he has already shown us this, has given us his counsel. Indeed he has given to all the same loving invitation: *You must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect*. And since our Lord has spoken so clearly, we need no further enlightenment. We have to strip our hearts of all earthly affections, and in poverty and nudity follow our Master, whose poverty was such that he had nowhere to lay his head.

What we have to ask of him is guidance over the manner in which we must follow the holy path trodden by our Lord; and we must urgently beg for light, the light which sweetly and effectively draws the hearts of all on whom it falls. My very dear friend in the Lord, have no fear: since we want nothing else but God's will, we shall be fully satisfied. Let us abandon ourselves to him; and may he deign to deal with us as the workman deals with his material. He loves us; he has loved us all from the beginning — that is the firm foundation of our confidence. It is my hope that the time in which the Lord will communicate special insight to us will be next Lent. I beg you to spend this time united with us in spirit, as we imitate the forty-day fast of Jesus Christ, so that we too may begin in penance. I hope, if God will grant me this favour, to pass these days with a friend in solitude. After this retreat I will think about coming to Rome, if nothing else comes up to prevent this. So I hope then to be able to give you some firm news over this important resolution. I hope too that our dear friends — especially Mellerio and Polidori among others — will aid us by their prayers to obtain God's help. I certainly intend to implore all of them to join us in our prayers.

For some time now I have been distinctly unwell. I am suffering from liver trouble, and have been spitting blood. But through God's grace I am not afraid

because of these ailments — may I always be able to say the same. And to be frank with you, if ever I have had reason to hope for the success of our enterprise, I seem to find it now in my infirmities. *God has chosen the weak things of this world* Because, alas, if I had a strong constitution this might nourish confidence in myself — I have a strong tendency that way! But oh, poor me if I were to fall into this snare. But when I see myself goad for nothing, and even (for the present) unable to study — the thing to which I was especially attached — when I find myself forbidden to talk, to read, to write ... all this makes me like a block of wood or stone, from which the Lord can carve whatever pleases him. My dear friend, if there were nothing else, the feeling that I am living a precarious life, with one foot in this world and the other in eternity — this indeed is something that consoles me, makes me happy; because it make that much easier the 'watching' that God enjoins on us, and animates my joy in waiting for the heavenly Bridegroom. A state such as mine makes us feel how useless we are! If things were different, we might be deluded into thinking that we were necessary to the Church of Jesus Christ So my feeble health dispels any such illusion of pride. My dear Don Giovanni, should I die before the work is completed, that would not necessarily mean that it would have to be held up or left abandoned. It could well be that my departing from this world would hasten it on and enlarge it. Who knows whether I am an obstacle in its way, or whether my sins are holding back the outpouring of the divine mercies on the Church? For long now, assuredly, I have offered my life in sacrifice, in union with the sacrifice of Jesus; and I renew this offering every time I approach the altar, saying to the heavenly Father that if by throwing overboard this disobedient Jonah the storm may be calmed, then let him jettison me without hesitation. However I do not know whether God has accepted me as a victim, and if I am to confess what I feel in my heart, it seems not, at present.

I embrace you, my dear friend. Please explain my sentiments to his Eminence Cardinal Cappellari and convey my respects to him, asking him to remember me and the work in his holy prayers.

A.R.

### 33. To Niccolò Tommaseo in Florence

Milan, 8 January 1828

Thank you for the three pages about Maurizio [Moschini], which I look forward to reading. I believe they will be in the Anthology, and I will look out for them. Thank you also for your advice about my health, which I must admit is shaky. On top of the previous problem of spitting blood, I now have liver trouble, and this interferes with all my activities. In the last few days, though, there has been some improvement. I had a fever but it did not last long. I am forbidden to apply myself to anything just now, but I bless the Lord for this enforced leisure. It seems to me that while I have to take up a horizontal position, so to speak, my mind daily receives new insights. A lazy existence brings me a serenity, a tranquillity, which gives me a joy much greater than the depressing effects of bodily ailments, even though these are of a kind to bring deep melancholy. How good the Lord is! If he punishes my body because of my sins, he strengthens my spirit, and seems to give me greater stamina so that I can stand the punishment. Thus as long as we abandon ourselves to him we shall be safe; from him we shall be able to draw the strength to bear the trials which go with this wretched life. It is only the less sad because it is short although, as I said, the strength and patience which God's grace affords us build our peace and joy on the sadness itself. Only we must pray, we must pray; because it is when we ask it of God that he enriches us with that vital grace, that immense spiritual joy.

I feel an obligation to you for something which I appreciate more in my miserable state than I would in other circumstances. I am referring to your having introduced me to the good Biava [Professor Samuele Biava]. He visits me nearly every evening and he delights me, he affords me relief, he consoles me, with his lofty and pious conversation. May the Lord draw him entirely to himself, so that that rare spirit may be devoted to him alone and to the glory of his Church!

Despite my infirmities, my thoughts on philosophy occupy my mind constantly, and I regret that I cannot reveal them all to the world in a day. How much light, it seems to me, that philosophy could shed, and how, too, it could enlighten eyes that have grown dim-sighted. I can do no less than manifest these thoughts to you, whereas to others this might seem an empty boast I am very aware that I may be deceiving myself; but I also know that I cannot overcome the strong conviction that fills my mind. I hope that you will employ all your great powers to the good cause to which I want to dedicate myself entirely — and this I hope to do. Certainly you will be able to render great services to humanity and to the Church, with your loftiness of heart, your intellectual eminence and the force of your style. Surely these gifts deserve to be used in their entirety in advancing God's cause and in devoting yourself to it with the same great love

shown once by Augustine, Jerome and so many other great minds, who knew no hesitation or divided affections, but with complete integrity committed themselves to pursuing the unity and totality of wisdom in the service of God and religion.

I will leave to another occasion a more detailed account of my present activities in what little time I am able to give to study. You know very well how welcome news of yourself will be to me. So you will not be mean about this: I want to know if you are happy with your present situation, what are your relations with others, your studies, your thoughts, your joys and your sorrows: I want to know everything about you. So write to me at length and in detail. There is nothing so small concerning you that it will not be gratifying to me to know. I send you the great affection with which I sign myself -

Yours,

A.R.

### 34. To Don G.B. Loewenbruck In Paris

Milan, 30 January 1828

My dear friend and brother in Jesus Christ,

I have only today received your welcome letter of 24 December, and I am replying without a single day's delay. My very dear friend in the Lord, can you possibly think that I left you without a reply because my feelings towards you have changed? Had that been the case, I would have written at once and not left you in a state of vexing and worrying doubt.

As regards your troubles, I understand their nature, since you clearly described them to me. But be comforted and consoled, my friend. Even in the midst of the grief I feel over them (since one can do no other than share the troubles of one's friends), I am greatly consoled by the way in which you speak of them. You bless the Lord, and want only to do his adorable will; you are ready to put up with all the sufferings and humiliations that the Lord sends you, even if they last a lifetime. Thanks be to God for this excellent disposition, which is his gift. We must never tire of thanking him in everything; we must never weary of saying, *bonuni mihi quia humiliasti me* [it is good that you have humbled me]. Let us offer ourselves to him entirely; and especially let us offer him all our thoughts and plans, so that he may do away with everything in them that is of us, everything human: let us be content if that is what pleases him, to be stupid and senseless all our lives, and incapable of thinking or doing anything. Provided that we can willingly make this sacrifice of all our powers, let us be content; since our impotence and inactivity will be sanctified and pleasing to him because of this initial sacrifice.

How necessary it is in our case that man does nothing, and the finger of God does all! He must demolish and annihilate all our projects, in order to remake them and create in us and in all his other servants that which he wills. Surely there is nothing more pleasing than to experience the failure of everything in ourselves that might be thought great and impressive according to human judgement, so that in our abjection, our complete annihilation, our stupidity, the power of Jesus Christ may make itself felt and renew everything. My dear friend, the extreme discouragement which you sometimes feel, the unsteadiness of your head (the most humiliating of all ills, second only to sin) — these experiences of yours will help you to know yourself, and make you never again doubt that the thoughts of men are vain and their counsels mistaken; you will put aside all that deceptive confidence that our corrupt nature is ever ready to arouse in us, and which has to be humbled and mortified, so that the glory of divine grace may shine forth in us, and that Jesus may live in us, and we be no more. The opinions given you by the doctors in Paris, even though they appear discouraging, will have a sanctifying effect on us because we shall be all the more receptive to the holy encouragements of the Lord.

My dear friend, you are unwell: I have to tell you that I am in the same condition, though I am feeling better now than I was. Would it not be worthy of God, and in agreement with his judgements and mercies of old if, in order to carry out some plan of his, he had destined for this two men, one of whom had lost his head and the other his voice? If this is the case (and if I may use a lowly image in such a high discourse) you would act the part of the blind man carrying the cripple!

What conclusion shall we draw? That you must pray earnestly to the Lord to see whether you share my feelings. My own view is this: we must meet this coming Lent at Domodossola, and there — praying and conferring together — we must ask the Lord for the light we need for the decisions we have to make over the future: not according to our own wills but in conformity with his adorable will.

My dear friend, I hope that the air of Monte Calvario will help you. We are not talking about a permanent arrangement — merely a trial lasting forty or fifty days. And do not suppose that we are going to pass that time in too great austerity and affliction: we will spend it as invalids should. The Lord will accept our afflictions in lieu of other heavy penances. How good he is, how tender. A mother could not be more so than he; rather, he is infinitely more tender than any mother. So come on 20 February, if this seems good to you, and your spirit so moves you. I look forward to welcoming you then. Have no doubts about my love for you: I should like to give you consolation and encouragement. With God's help I shall give you all the attentions that charity suggests. Our infirmities will lead us to be kind to one another, and this situation of ours will be a warning to us that we must treat others kindly, and be a reminder of the holy discretion which we must use in drawing up the rules of the Society which the Lord may want to establish through us.

I will end by embracing you warmly in the Lord, to whom alone be glory for ever. Amen. May Mary our Mother intercede for us so that the greatest glory may be given to him. Write me a line as soon as you receive this, because I am anxious to know that it has arrived. *Goodbye. Fear not, little flock. If you think you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may be wise. All flesh is grass, and its glory like the flowers of the field*

A.R.



### 35. To the brothers Peter and Paul Orsi at Rovereto

Calvario, 19 February 1828

The Lord has given me health enough to enable me to be here for Ash Wednesday.<sup>12</sup> This has been my great hope, and the day seemed endless in arriving. My plan is to spend this Lent in retreat — I might say in the desert — in memory of the example our Lord gave us of penance and of preparing to carry out the will of our heavenly Father. Join yourselves with me in spirit, I beg; and you two, who bear the names of the greatest of the apostles, get these two patrons of the Church to look favourably on me through your prayers. May the love and friendship which you have shown me ever since I was a child prove itself now that I have such need of it. Pray that I may weep over the Passion of the Man-God on the mountain of sacrifice, and that I may be made one with Jesus crucified.

I have made no decision so far, other than to live for forty days far from the world, to bring peace to my body and soul, and to give an attentive ear to the words which the Lord may be pleased to let me hear. Nothing more for the moment. When there is anything else to report I will write to you.

I am in quite good health. How good the Lord is! He provides even for our weakness; he stays by us like a loving mother until we are weaned.

I am very sorry to hear that Stofelia's illness was worse than I thought, and that it is not yet over. May God compensate him for it by great spiritual benefit. Greet him for me; and think fondly of me, both of you, as your old friend who loves you greatly as he writes to you now. Even if you did not recognize the handwriting, you would recognize the affection of one who does not need to sign his name. Goodbye.

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<sup>12</sup> Rosmini arrived at Domodossola in the evening of 19 February. The next day he went up to Calvario and said Mass there; and on Ash Wednesday (which in that year fell on 20 February) he inaugurated the Institute of Charity there on Monte Calvario.

**36. To Luigi de Apollonia at Padua**

Domodossola, 27 February 1828

My dear Luigi,

Between my infirmities and my busy life I cannot write to you as often as I should like. But I cannot leave your kind letter without at least a few lines in reply. I take great comfort from the admirable sentiments by which you raise your heart from the study of created things to adoration of the Creator. You are blessed in that you make this ascent. Research into matter is an arid thing unless it takes into account the creative mind of God who orders it, keeps it in being, rules over it, and animates it to one sole end. The natural universe is a canticle the heavens, the earth, the very stones, and man himself — all sing in concert the praises of God. As you say, how wonderful is the structure of the human body, forming a unity out of so many parts. Marvellous, too, is the phenomenon of life, the highest manifestation to be found in nature and the most mysterious. The mind of the unbeliever is baffled by it the faithful Christian is moved, and his mind is filled with light as he adores the Creator. The laws of life are so providential; its gradations amaze us; and its changes are evidence of wisdom.

The sentiments you express do you honour — I beg you, preserve them like a treasure. When your studies lead you to God this makes not only for your honour but for glory — imperishable glory. You ask for my advice, and I can do no less than open my heart to one who deserves so well. So I would counsel you to join prayer to your studies — prayer, which to begin with is painful, but which brings joy as you progress in it. Humble and simple prayer elevates and enlightens the mind.

With great esteem and affection I embrace you in the Lord. If you are writing to your brother [Don Sebastiano] tell him all that you know to be in the heart of your friend,

A.R.

### 37. To Count Giovanni Padulli in Rome

Monte Calvario, 29 February 1828

I have received your most welcome letter here on this beautiful mountainside, where I have been since the beginning of Lent. It came only today, though dated 30 January, and I am giving myself the pleasure of replying to it without delay, and in this way being with you ... Here I am, then, in the place where I was so anxious to be; and at the time I had fixed in my mind for the beginning of my stay. All this is what I was greatly looking forward to. Heaven help me if I do not profit by this occasion, which the Lord grants me so that I may be converted.

I have one great comfort in the midst of my sorrow for my sins: the love of my friends — and your love in particular, together with the sacrifice you have made. God, who looks at the heart, has certainly accepted it, for it was a sacrifice made out of humility and contrition. I speak in these terms so as to give glory to God, who is pleased to make his love shine out in our poverty and wretchedness.

How full of perils is this life of ours, in which we may fall from moment to moment and how much more secure it would be to die in a state of grace; for only then shall we be able to glory in God. Still, the very uncertainty in which we live — unsure about ourselves and our state of soul — although this is one of our great miseries, yet it will be turned to profit by the goodness of God, who will not allow our hopes to be disappointed; for heaven and earth will pass away, but his words will never do so; and those words are: *Whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will grant you*. So let us ask all things of him without limit, for his power is without limit, measureless. So let us ask for perseverance, for spiritual perfection — which means being consumed in the love of the Father. Taken up into him, we shall have the fullness of life, sharing it with Jesus Christ. How wonderful it would be, to have no life of our own, but to have the life of Jesus as our life. This would mean an eternity free from sin, pure light, the fullness of joy.

My dear friend, I will tell you what you want to know about this holy Lent, and how I should so much like us to spend it in union with one other: we should pray during the fast which the Church prescribes; pray and fast in union with all the Christians of the world, pray without limit, without ceasing; pray with simplicity and total abandonment; pray without asking for anything in particular, but only that the name of the Father may be hallowed, that everything may redound to his glory; that his kingdom may come — the kingdom of which Christ is King; the kingdom predestined from the foundation of the world: in other words, pray for the Church, which must extend to every people, put all things in subjection to itself... so that God's will may be done as it is in heaven, in his saints, so also on earth, among those still in this world, so that in them too may come about the salvation which God desires for all.

I am delighted that you have joined the Sodality of Mary under the direction of the Jesuit Fathers. Our Lady will suggest to you what more there is to do in this Lent, so do as she says; and ask her to enlighten me. I too wish to do everything she may inspire me to do, provided that she will also obtain for me the necessary grace.

I have been here, as I said, since Shrove Tuesday, and I am content with everything except myself. I have one companion with me<sup>13</sup>, but Loewenbruck is not yet here. However he has written to say that he has successfully sorted out his affairs; and I take it as the work of divine Providence that he has been able to do this before joining me. I await him anxiously, and hope he will soon arrive. His letters manifest great humility and sincerity and raise my hopes high. I greatly need him, with his zeal and his active temperament I myself tend to be inert, and undecided even over small matters. This is why I have not yet taken in hand the repair of the fabric here, and am leaving it all to my French friend. I do not even venture to receive any further companions as yet because there is no one to impose a proper discipline; I could only give them a bad example through my laziness and slackness. But if the Frenchman comes I will accept more companions; may God help me then to give the least possible scandal and somehow to retain a good name among them.

If it is God's will that this union should come about then it has been preordained from eternity. So let us ask him only that he will sanctify us according to his eternal purpose; thus we shall place ourselves entirely at his disposal. Let your heart aim only at perfection, and make no decisions. Perfection is all we desire, and the means are a matter of indifference. The Lord will certainly console you.

I hope to come to Rome, though not before the autumn; as far as I can see, it will take me till then to arrange things here. And only then shall I be ready for what I may see needs to be done there. I say I hope to come, and to come not alone but with dear Mellerio. I cannot describe how united we are in heart — and soon we shall be joined by your brother, Giulio. He has written me a letter which moves me greatly. Oh, may God fill him with himself! He is surely on the way to salvation. Mellerio knows nothing of what I have said about him; it is I who foresee what will become of him, please God. My warm greetings to your sons: I am very glad they give you so much consolation.

Should you see Cardinal Cappellari, give him my respectful greetings; and if you think fit, tell him where I am. My best wishes to Brunati. And you, my dear friend, I embrace in the Lord. We are in agreement Let us persevere through this Lent in memory of the fast made by our Lord, awaiting his word and his coming.

Affectionately, R.

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<sup>13</sup> Rosmini's companion was a young priest named Don Andrea Fenner, who had replaced Maurizio Moschini as his secretary.

### 38. To Count Giulio Padulli in Milan

Domodossola. 1 March 1828

My beloved Giulio,

[The first paragraph expresses Rosmini's gratitude for the prayers of his friends and his esteem for their holy desires.]

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall have their fill.* These words must greatly comfort us and encourage us to amend ourselves with tireless perseverance. For an infallible oracle promises us that in time we shall certainly bear fruit, however unpromising things may look to us, however feeble we feel ourselves to be, however slow our progress towards spiritual perfection may seem. For my part, I regard it as a safe rule of conduct, full of hope, to desire righteousness and to hold on tirelessly to this desire, this resolution — even when we seem to fall short and to lack the strength to rise up again ... when our love is turned to stone, and we are weighed down by the overpowering burden of the clay from which we were made. In the meantime, as you rightly say, we can profit in the midst of our miseries from a grain or two of humility: for it is to humility alone that God stretches out a rescuing hand; for nothing pleases him so much as to raise up the humble from the ground where they have fallen and lie prostrate. But I have no wish to turn this letter into a sermon, even if I am inclined to do so. And so I thank you for your charity and your confidence, and I beg you to go on working on my behalf before the Lord, to whom those who take up the cause of the poor are always dear.

Ever yours,

### 39. To Don Giovanni Boselli and to Francesca Bonetti<sup>14</sup> in Milan

Domodossola, on the feast of St Joseph 1828

My dear friends,

Grace and peace to both of you. I am enclosing with this a letter to the Marchesa di Canossa, that excellent lady whom we must respect as a mother. Give it to her with my deepest respects. I hope that both of you are remembering me always in your sacrifices and your prayers, as I too have not forgotten to commend you to almighty God. A good part of this Lent (which we are making in memory of the Lord) has already gone by, and I have not written to you, simply so as not to multiply letters needlessly, since our hearts are united. May the Lord fill you with his peace and joy during this time of penance. I believe that he will not leave his servants in the dark about his holy will, at least if we seek it with simplicity and carry it out with joy. I want nothing else, for there is no other good but this. Let me know all your thoughts about the matter, for that will bring me consolation. Give your letter to Don Luigi, who has the means of sending it to me. Let us not do things by halves, or look back rather than do that, it would be better not to begin at all; and let our intention be upright in the Lord's sight. We must humble ourselves at all times and never cease to purify ourselves; let us think about our own state before we concern ourselves with others. If we are to reproach anyone, it must be ourselves. Nor must we envy the happiness of others — much less their indolence. Here I am still without my companion [Don Loewenbruck]. I am busy setting this house in order, and I have become very fond of it. May the Lord be our bond of union. Goodbye.

A.R.

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<sup>14</sup> The Marchesa Maddalena di Canossa had entrusted Francesco Bonetti and Don Giovanni Boselli to the spiritual guidance of Rosmini.

#### 40. To the Marchesa Maddalena di Canossa at Verona

Monte Calvario, the feast of St Joseph 1828

I owe you a letter, and after some delay I am now paying my debt. You are always ready to forgive me, so I have come to count on your indulgence! The chief matter I very much want to make clear to you is that of my dealings with the Bishop of Trent, in order to obtain his permission to go to Milan — permission which he has graciously given.

I did not want to leave the diocese without his consent, so when he invited me to accept some permanent employment I took the opportunity to say to him more or less what follows:

'If your Lordship considers such a thing desirable, you have only to command me, and I promise to obey, and to obey willingly. But if you leave the matter to my own judgement, I must say that I do not think this is the will of God. In the first place, I do not think that I have at present the strength, moral or physical, to take on either the care of souls or the direction of the seminary (which he had offered me]. Also, this step would mean that I should have to break off entirely from the other occupations which I have been engaged in for a considerable time, and through which, with God's help, I hope perhaps to do good in a wider sphere. So if you do not wish to command me, but leave me to follow my own intimate convictions, it would be my intention to devote myself to two aims: first, to renew (as far as my abilities allow) the study of philosophy; for the decline of philosophy has brought with it the decay of theology; and this in turn has caused great harm to religion which, mainly for this reason, finds itself so badly treated and without any adequate response to the attacks made on it. Secondly, I would wish to implement an idea suggested to me by the Marchesa Maddalena di Canossa when a suitable opportunity presents itself — that of establishing a house of Sons of Charity, similar to her own Institute of the Daughters of Charity; though my idea would be to extend the range of charitable activities that the religious would engage in. The Marchesa put her proposal to our Empress, and was by her warmly encouraged to realize it. So I should like to go ahead with this plan, in so far as Providence furnishes me with the occasion. At the same time, to show you my real attachment to our diocese, I intend (when the right time comes) to acquire from my sister the house of St Mary's, formerly a Carmelite convent, in Rovereto, and to return it to the service of God, giving it over to the work I have mentioned.'

The Bishop appeared to be pleased by what I said in this letter, and he gave his full approval to my going to Milan — where, as I told him, I should be better placed to study philosophy. This is as much as I revealed to the Bishop: I said nothing to him about my intention of being myself one of these religious, but simply stated that I would help forward the work as occasion presented itself.

I beg you, when you get to Trent, to help in this matter, speaking of it on the lines I have described, and as the Lord may inspire you.

The second matter I must mention in this letter is the present state of our affairs. You already know, from what I have said previously, how I had arranged to be here with my French friend [Don Loewenbruck], so as to keep Lent together, to pray to God, and to develop the foundations of the work. Now, the Frenchman is not to be found here: he is still in France, and I do not know when he will be free to join us. So I am here alone (apart from a priest and two lay brothers). But I am happy in this retreat. The Lord has restored my health, and I am wholly occupied in meditating on his will and listening to his voice. For the rest since I have made it a principle of my way of life (as I told you before) to abandon myself to divine Providence, I intend to remain perfectly content, with the help of his grace, ready for anything that God wants, and refusing nothing that he may give me to do in his service. Meanwhile, I shall see to setting this house in order, so well placed as it is, in order to begin on this rock, this Calvary. You will hear more from my good friends Boselli and Bonetti about what has passed between us. I ask you, I beseech you in Christ, to help me with your insights and your prayers. Do write and tell me what you think about all this. I will try to make good use of your advice.

Believe me, your most devoted servant

A.R.



## 41. To Don Sebastiano de Apollonia at Udine

Monte Calvario, Wednesday of Holy Week 1828

My dear friend,

I am replying at once, according to your wish and mine too. Certainly I am not the one who can say to you: *Leave your nets and follow me*. Rather, this should be said to me. But, my dear friend, if Mother says this to you, then do not delay: do not your own will but his; leave your nets and follow that call. If you have ties, then consider the matter well, and he who calls you will suggest how you can put everything in order — if not at once, then when it is his will. Meanwhile foster that call within yourself: do not suppress it. No, I am not saying: 'Come to me'. Were I to do so I should be answerable for what might happen in the future; and I cannot be guarantor even for the present let alone the future. But if Mother tells you to come, it is he who will stand surety for what he commands. I will welcome anyone who comes when I believe he is sent by God; otherwise I could not receive him. If you come, you will give me joy, and I shall know that the words are true, or at least that they are an intimation of something which had to come about.

I am here on a mountain which, with its solitude and its reminders of the mysteries of the Passion of Christ, seems to me at once a paradise and a place of suffering. This place is well suited to raise our thoughts to eternity, to Christ who dwells there and to his mercy. It is good to look down on the world from above, to see the worthlessness of its riches, the emptiness of its pomps, the bitterness of its pleasures. It is a place which makes it easy to see ourselves as belonging to God alone, to sense our own nothingness, and to hear the words of that great judgement that awaits us all. And this is the motive for my stay up here — to know myself better, and in the light of eternal truth to look into the depth and the darkness of my sins. And can you doubt that it would be a great comfort to have the company of a friend?

You say that if I need you, you will come. But it is the Lord, not myself, who must tell you whether I need you. Pray to him over this, as I will; and follow promptly and courageously whatever light he shows you. But let your prayer be both fervent and made in a spirit of abandonment to his will; let your heart be generous towards the Lord, as generous as man can be, as generous as that of the old woman who offered her two mites. And our prayer must be made perfect in patience and perseverance; blessed are those who hold fast to the Lord, while they wait for those precious moments which only he knows. My dear Don Sebastiano, it is while you are at the altar that God will tell you if I have need of you; and there he will tell you, too, what great need we both have of him. I certainly feel this need — I feel it in the very heart of me. May he become our life and our being, so that we shall no longer live in ourselves but in him. Then we shall see how much we need him. How blessed it is to realize our

own poverty. Those who have this understanding can be happy only through knowing how entirely they depend on *God*, how all that they have, all that they are, comes from him. Is this what you mean when you speak in your letter of knowledge of the *Absolute*, the knowledge that you say you have tried to acquire? What a noble study this is, which applies itself to gain the knowledge which is the beatitude of the saints!

But I do not want to detain you any longer. Let it be agreed between us that you will consult the Lord and do whatever he inspires you to do. If, then, you come, I will welcome you as one who has been sent by *God*. For the rest, have no worries. As to Maurizio, let me quote the line: 'I have only missed, not lost my son.

Your friend,

R.

## 42. To Count Marco Passi at Calcinatè

Monte Calvario, 11 April 1828

My dear friend,

It is the will of God that we should become perfect everything else is of no importance. Let us make this our aim and remain at peace. His voice is gentle, and his promptings cause us neither stress nor anxiety. May nothing on earth prevent us from giving ear to his voice, lest we lose our lives in trying to save them. So persevere in tilling the field the Lord has placed you in. If your heart is free of human ties, it will know well when to make a change when the Lord gives the signal. We should never act purely of our own accord, but by purifying ourselves we must become such that God may do with us as he pleases. This we know for certain is God's will for us, because he wants to bring us to salvation, not perdition. We do not know anything else until he reveals it to us. So let us live in peace of mind, not making any changes until he prompts us to do so.

I have been here since the beginning of Lent, in a little household of four; but the friend to whom you send greetings has not yet come. I await his arrival, but it seems that the Lord is facing him with some hard trials. It is God's way to use sufferings to prepare us — may he be thanked for them. We must never begrudge being generous in face of such bounty — how can we be? In fact it seems to me very foolish even to speak of being generous towards God; but we call ourselves generous when we manage to avoid acting meanly.

Believe that I esteem and love you greatly. Please send me your news from time to time.

Yours affectionately,

A.R.

### 43. To Don Giovanni Boselli In Milan

Monte Calvario, 14 April 1828

My dear friend,

Since we can no longer meet face to face as we did in Milan, let us at least meet from time to time by letter. And I feel an even greater wish to write to you on this occasion because of some of the things you say in your welcome letter. Certainly I want us both to be (as you say) children of the one mother, charity. This has always been a wish very dear to me, as I said when we were together. 'It is necessary,' you add, to decide on the road to take, so that if anyone asks, "What am I to do?", he may be able to judge in what direction his call lies.' And it is for just such a reason that I have chosen this place of retirement, that I have kept Lent here on this mountain dedicated to the Passion of our Redeemer — so as to consult the Lord, in order that he may make clear what is his adorable will. Certainly, he will not leave us in the dark this is a truth, my dear friend, of which I have no doubt; and I hope that through his infinite mercy, by acting as I am, I am doing what he wills. If you ask me just what it is that I am doing, I would find it impossible to answer in writing; for if I were to say in general terms that I want only to abandon myself to divine Providence, to live in humility and peace, with no desire except for holiness, without disquiet, but with constancy and a will ready for action, it would only seem that I was not telling you what you wanted to know.

As for what you say — that when there is a choice among works of charity it is prudent to choose the lowliest, I agree with you entirely — as long as there really is room for choice; and long as God has not made it clear that he wills differently; as long as we are not attracted either to what is low or what is high, and do not glory even in being humble; finally, as long as we realize that nothing in the world is really high or low.

My own conviction is that what the Lord wants of me is that I should seek nothing, and as far as is in me, should refuse nothing ... rather that I should make a total offering of myself to him, without prejudging what his will may be or putting any sort of limit to it; but instead should make myself entirely his slave and servant. How happy should I be if I could totally identify myself with his will! So I can truthfully say to you: if anyone asks me whether I want to perform the lowliest acts of charity, I would not dare to answer 'yes' at once, without adding, too: 'provided that I am not seeking these, but that divine Providence offers these to me in the light of external circumstances. So if anyone were to ask me if I want to refuse the nobler works of charity, should Providence offer these to me through external circumstances, I should again not dare to say 'yes'. But at the same time I should not want to refuse them. So it is not merely charity, but charity according to the will of God that I want

above all; so that I may not do my own will (under the pretext of charity) but rather that of God, who is charity.

But as I said, I cannot in a letter give you a clear idea of what I mean; though the little I have said contains it all. It remains true, as you say, that the Society will keep the main features of the Daughters of Charity, allowing though for the differences between men and women, and between lay people and priests. The charity exercised by women is necessarily less extensive than that which men can accomplish; so too priests can have a wider scope than laymen. Jesus Christ shows his will to everyone: let everyone carry it out women, men, priests — they all have their own sphere of action. No one must decide it for himself, but rather be indifferent God decides it for each one, and no one may any longer be indifferent once the Lord has spoken. So your conclusion is admirable: 'Let us stand firm at the foot of the cross, and he will not let us be deceived.' Let each of us wait in peace, in hope, in joy, doing good and expecting the Lord: always persevering contentedly.

I am glad to hear that your chats continue [he means with Francesco Bonetti]. Encourage one another, especially in devotion to our Redeemer and our Lady of Sorrows. I do not know whether you have copied out that Summary of the Maxims that, I imagine, Mezzanotte has left with you. If you have done, please let me have back the original. Let us love one another in the Lord, to whom be all honour and glory. Goodbye.

A.R.

#### 44. To Don Giovanni Boselli in Milan

Monte Calvario, 2 May 1828

Let us adore the Lord in all his ways. As regards what you say about wishing to be here immediately after Pentecost I can only repeat what I have said to you on previous occasions. I am not able to say to you, 'Come', because I myself need to be called. I am not the one who calls but the one who is called. If you too are called, then come. The one who gives the call is the one who guarantees, makes secure, the steps taken by the one who answers the call. If I were to give the call, I should have to give that guarantee — and that would make me a liar, should I do so. But if it is God who does the calling, he must give the guarantee, and he is both faithful and true. Let us obey his voice and put our trust in his mercy.

As for what you say about temporal goods and the means by which to live, have no doubts: I say again: let us abandon ourselves to Providence. If you can offer only a little to God, it will be welcome, provided it is all that you have. The widow in the gospel offered little, but her two mites were accepted because it was all she possessed. St Peter, when he left his boat and his nets, had little enough; but he had reason for confidence, because he had abandoned all he possessed and could say to the Lord, *We have left all things*. But we must remember that our 'all' comprises not only the present but the future too — all that we may have, not just all we now have. If your offering is of this kind, then trust in Providence. For the rest, I say again: imagine you are alone with God in this world and weigh matters in his presence. If you act like this you will not be putting your trust in men — much less in me. My advice to you is: be perfect; but nothing else, because that is the counsel of Jesus Christ, and everything besides must come from the Spirit of Jesus Christ diffused in our hearts, by which we say with confidence, 'Our Father'. If the Spirit of Jesus calls you, it would give me great pleasure to celebrate Pentecost with you and Francesco.

If you decide to come, then do so not indefinitely but for a trial period — say, two or three months or even less. The Lord will let you know if you must prolong the time. So you will be telling the Rector the truth if you say that you are going to make a spiritual retreat and nothing more. God will not be displeased by this; for the only unending, irrevocable and unlimited decision he wants from us is our resolve to be perfect — that alone. So let us proceed slowly ... I mean as long as we remain less than certain about his will. And so we shall take one day at a time, yet always with an eye on eternity — on eternity as far as perfection itself is concerned; day by day as regards the means to be used. We shall remain indifferent to all means, not rejecting any, since everything is good that comes from God: *everything that is born of God overcomes the world*

Now a few words to Bonetti. Do not worry over the lack of means of subsistence: God will provide. What I have said to Bonelli goes for you too:

offer everything. That is sufficient. Take counsel with your spiritual director and do what he tells you. If the Lord sends you here, I already extend to you a hearty welcome. Let us all keep praying to Jesus Christ our Redeemer and to our Lady of Sorrows, ready to serve the Lord with joy. We must humble ourselves continually, purify ourselves. We must have an insatiable desire for holiness, and want nothing else. May God render us just! He alone can do this; and then we shall no longer be confounded — *I shall not be put to shame when I look into your law*. Let us love one another. This is the badge of Christ's disciples, and what a sweet device it is. If only we could all be one with Jesus in God the Father and the Holy Spirit. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Yours,

A.R.

## 45. To his Eminence Cardinal Morozzo, Bishop of Novara

Domodossola, 28 May 1828

Your Eminence,

The reason why I have not written earlier to you giving you positive news about the plans I have concerning this *holy mount* is simply my own uncertainty.

Now that your Eminence has asked me about the situation, I will speak with all the frankness I owe you. And to this end, allow me to go into some detail over myself so that you can be *au fait* with the circumstances.

At first out of natural inclination, and much later through reflection, I have made it a rule of conduct not to seek of my own accord any particular occupation, but not to pass over any that was offered to me (when I felt I had the necessary strength). It was as if I heard the voice of Providence in these spontaneously occurring opportunities of doing some good — a voice that I could not rightly refuse to obey. And when no particular occupation presented itself, I found in prayer and study quite enough to banish idleness.

These were my dispositions when, some years back the Marchesa di Canossa, a lady well known for her pious spirit and for the institutions she has founded, wrote to me putting forward a plan of hers to initiate a certain *Institute of the Sons of Charity*, very similar in spirit to that of the *Daughters of Charity*, which had been introduced by her, with great benefit, in the Lombardy-Venice region, and soon after in the Tyrol. When I examined the plan I raised certain objections to it — some of which I later came to see were unfounded. From that time forward to the present day we have kept up a correspondence about her plan. It was in 1825, I think, that on the occasion of answering one of her letters, there came to my mind a kind of extension of the Marchesa's plan; and this I have never forgotten. It seemed to me that what I envisaged was willed by God, though I did not know by whom or by what means the idea could be realized.

Humanly speaking, so far this was no more than words and thoughts, since I could not be sure that it was the will of God that I, personally or through others, should make a beginning on such a work. And on the other hand, given that it was not my practice to do anything unless others provided the motivation, or the opportunity presented itself unsought, there seemed no likelihood that this work would come about.

In 1826 I had occasion to go to Milan, where I remained until last February and busied myself there with my studies, though the idea I have mentioned never left my mind. Some possibilities occurred to me during that time which led me to decide how I would act in the future. The friendship with which Count



Mellerio honoured me, together with his exceptional religious spirit, put me under some obligation to confide to him the matter which was preoccupying my mind.

Last June I made the acquaintance of a certain Don Loewenbruck at Mellerio's home. He had proposed to the Count an institute for ecclesiastics, something which he said he had long thought about, and the Count must have mentioned that I too had a similar idea. At any rate, Loewenbruck soon took me aside and warmly exhorted me to join him. I told him that first we must together consider our vocations, to see whether they did indeed coincide; and then we could speak of the matter afresh. I told him also that I could not compromise over my general thoughts on the subject I told him about these, and left him time to reflect. After a while he assured me in a letter (when I had already left Milan) that he was in complete agreement with my ideas. Moreover, he had seen the Calvary of Domodossola and found it suitable for the purpose. And I too, when I went to see it, thought it a fitting place in which to make a start. I was indeed surprised to see how closely the house and the place conformed to the idea I had envisaged. After this I told my zealous companion that although I was pleased with it all, I was a long way from making any definite resolution. My weakness prevented me, and if the Cardinal of Novara were satisfied, I could only commit myself to such action as would not have unforeseeable consequences. In other words, I would restore the fabric and adapt it for use, because I saw this as merely involving the expenditure of a few thousand lire, and this in any case would not be wasted, since even if we did not use it ourselves, the improvements would be of service to any others who might make use of this holy place. In addition I intended to retire here for Lent in order to purify my conscience somewhat, to ask the Lord to make clear his will, and to confer together with Loewenbruck over the foundation of the work should God wish it to be realized. Consequently we agreed to join one another on the holy mount on Ash Wednesday this year, which was 20 February. As this decision was only a temporary one, I came here without attracting any notice, accompanied by two people who normally come with me when I travel. Loewenbruck, however, was unable to come, and you tell me that he may have entered the Jesuits.<sup>15</sup>

After spending Lent here I was tempted to prolong my stay (since your Eminence gave me leave to do so), both so that at this time of year the air and the surroundings might improve my rather poor health, and again because of my habitual disposition of making no change without some indication given me by Providence.

Now, a few days ago I received a letter from a Milanese priest, Giovanni Boselli, in which he expressed a wish to join me. I had already been introduced to this

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<sup>15</sup> Cardinal Morozzo suspected that this was so. (See *Vita di Antonio Rosmini*, Vol. I, p.304.)

priest (who is about 33 I think) in Milan by the Marchesa di Canossa, who had spoken to him about her plan. He visited me from time to time of an evening while I was in Milan, so that we could confer about spiritual matters. I replied to his letter saying that since I myself was in need of a call from God, I could not call him, and that the one who calls must be someone who can guarantee the consequences of that call — something I could not do; but that if he believed that he was called by the Lord, he should come — since I could not refuse him if this were the case. I told him that he should abandon himself to divine Providence without looking to me for anything. He has since written to me to say that he will be here by Trinity Sunday. I know him to be both pious and intelligent. So these are my present circumstances. Your Eminence will see that I am uncertain about any decisions concerning my future.

In order that you may have a clear idea of the project in question, which will be put into effect only in as yet contingent circumstances, I am including with this letter a short description of it in Latin. The whole spirit behind it would in essence be a development of the maxim by which I guide my conduct, and in which there are two main elements:

(1) To seek one's own perfection in a hidden and retired life devoted to *study* and *prayer*. This would constitute the *first state*, so to speak both of the individual and of the society that practised it — the *elective state*.

(2) To devote oneself, according to the order of charity, to the *requests of one's neighbour*, as far as one's strength would permit, in the exercise of such charity. In this way both the individual and the society that practised this maxim would (in obedience to the voice of Providence as shown by external circumstances) pass on to the *second state*, not the elective one but that assumed out of love of one's neighbour.

While I have been here, not only have I never abandoned this thought, but rather it has taken on such completeness that it can no longer exist simply in my mind.

I earnestly ask your Eminence to implore the Lord's blessing for me, so that I may do only his will; and also to defend and support everything that you believe to come from his Holy Spirit.

Forgive the length of this letter; but I thought it necessary to inform you of the whole course of events.

With great respect etc.,

A.R.

## 46. To Don Giuseppe Brunati at Brescia

Monte Calvario, Feast of St Aloysius 1828

My dear friend,

There is no doubt that, as you say, the greatest grace the Lord can give us is the opportunity to suffer something for love of him. If we were without such sufferings we should always be wretched, because of our attachment to ourselves and to the things of this earth, which are only vanity and misery. The eyes of our spirit would be blind, unable to see where our true happiness lay; we should lack a genuine spiritual life. And this is why, sure of the mercy of God, I certainly ought to — and do in fact — count among my greatest blessings the bodily infirmities he sends me, which I live with, and which keep me alert, since they in part reveal me to myself. But the complete revelation will come only with death. You tell me that this year you have received important lessons from the One who alone loves you, and wants to see you made perfect through afflictions ... I understand this from the way you speak, and it is something precious to me to see how deeply you value the life of perfection, as your letter shows. Clearly you recognize that this is an unspeakable grace of the Lord, a great and matchless treasure, out of all proportion to earthly things; and, far from diminishing, your ardour grows. All this makes me think that the Lord destines you in his mercy to render him a life of service which will be more intimate, more perfect, more total, than a life in the world, whether that of a scholar or of a literary man. I congratulate you on this grace. Our Lady, St Ignatius and St Aloysius will complete the work which they appear to have begun in you. Pray therefore for me, a wretched sinner.

I shall be visiting Brescia towards the end of July, to take the waters at Recoaro. It would be a great joy to me if I could see you then. But God knows if you will be there at that time.

Goodbye, my dear friend. I will say nothing now of my studies, since we shall have time to go into such things. You will have received my small works.

May all be well with you. My one desire is to love God — to whom be honour and glory for ever. Amen.

A.R.

#### 47. To Professor Samuele Biava in Milan

Monte Calvario, 6 July 1828

... I share your admiration for the hero of Somasca [St Jerome Emiliani], and am conscious of the great benefits which he gave to humanity. But it is a pity that all your fine Christian exhortation is founded on an untrue supposition — namely on the over-favourable notion you have formed of me! My dear friend, I have to confess to my shame that I am not capable of what you suggest or indeed of anything approaching it. At the same time, God forbid that I should put obstacles in the way of anything that divine Providence may have in mind for me, since God can easily do through me, as through anyone else, what I alone am unable to do. He has the power to raise up children to Abraham from the very stones, and every word of his is creative. This is the reason why for many years now I have made it my rule of conduct to live in him, never to undertake anything of myself, but rather to obey any indication the Lord gives to direct my actions. Tommaseo, seeing how I behave, sometimes accuses me of laziness — a reproach I prefer to that of presumption. My sole idea is this: if I could carry out faithfully the duties of my state, if I could arrive at the justice which consists in fulfilling the law of God, if I never fell short of obeying that law which is the very abyss of wisdom, since it contains all wisdom, then I should be sufficiently great in the eyes of God, however insignificant I remained in the eyes of men. The invisible God is a just judge, whereas the judgement of men is like an infected breath of wind that leaves behind it nothing but harmful dust. So if I could live in the way I have described, I should be of some use, for I should be occupying the place assigned to me by the Creator of the universe.

A.R.

## 48. To Don G.B. Loewenbruck at Domodossola

Recoaro, August 1828

My dear friend and brother in the Lord,

Let us formulate a maxim of conduct — one that I hope you too will find sound; and that is: to speak of nothing beyond what can be verified at the present moment and promise nothing about the future; and even in speaking (as we may) of what is true now, to use simplicity. There must be no exaggeration: it is better to say too little rather than too much, so that the manifest facts accord with our words rather than taking away from their force. -

As for not being assured about the future, we are so wretched, so easily mistaken, that we cannot commit ourselves — far less others. I say these things, not because I suppose that you are of a different mind, but in order to establish shared rules of conduct by which we shall be constantly bound. The rule of not making promises or feeling certain about the future is one that derives from the whole spirit which must animate us — one of tranquillity and constancy. And there are several reasons that should give us an intimate persuasion of the need for this rule. When these have deeply penetrated our minds they are very powerful, and are capable of ensuring consistency and stability in our way of acting. Here are the reasons:

(1) The profound respect which we owe to divine Providence. We must not be so presumptuous as to try to fathom its secrets; rather, we must always adore its workings, content to know only as much as God successively reveals to us, and for the rest, remain satisfied in peaceful ignorance;

(2) Our certainty that God is good. Although he may work in a hidden way, a way often quite different from our way of thinking, it remains true that whatever he does, he always has in mind what is best for us;

(3) The profound persuasion we have of our own nothingness. We are convinced that by nature we are fallible, fickle and inconstant; and so we have good reasons to *work out our salvation in fear and trembling*, unable (as long as we are in this world) ever to be sure of ourselves;

(4) Our deep faith in God, and so in his greatness, in his being our '*summum bonum*' [our highest good], our all... it follows that if we hold God in such high esteem, then — possessing him alone — we have everything: nothing is wanting to us; and if we believe that we can find God in every place, in all the circumstances of our lives, then doubtless we shall always be perfectly content, whatever place or situation we find ourselves in. And so we shall regard any and every disquiet we may feel as an imperfection, a lack of faith, and we shall betake ourselves to God so that we may overcome it and obtain the grace of his

light to illuminate the eyes of our hearts so that we may see him, know him, and hold him as our unique treasure, reckoning all other things as nothing, and seeing as mere dung all the objects that promise to give us the momentary satisfactions that our lower nature craves. Oh, if only our treasure were in God alone, our hearts would be so different! But as it is, we are inconstant because we do not want God alone, but set our hearts on other things besides. And in this way, without being aware of it, we confuse our love of our Creator with love of creatures, because of our lack of spiritual discernment and living faith.

So let one of the fundamental rules of our conduct be this: always to be content with our present state, because in it we can possess the Lord — that is, our all; we are not to concern ourselves at all about the future but wait upon God, without making any human calculation or provision for it. Nor, consequently, shall we dare to speak with any certainty about it.' This is one of those maxims that have great power: I would call it one of the maxims of our state. To act in accordance with it calls for constant reflection, as is the case with all general maxims. The more general a maxim is, the greater simplicity it has, and the easier it is to understand. But such maxims are the more difficult to put into practice since they cover a wider sphere and call for unceasing vigilance. The force of the maxim is revealed when we draw the practical consequences from it, showing all its powerful splendour. It will give me great pleasure if you will send me your reflections on all this.

The first consequence of following the maxims I have explained is that of fulfilling with the greatest care all the duties of our present state, regarding them highly, even though they may seem unimportant to our human eyes. Nothing is small to the eyes of faith when it is a matter of working for our Lord Jesus Christ: everything is great, since Christ is in all things. It is human pride which obscures our vision and makes us unable to discern the things of God. When our gaze does not see Christ in things, we measure their greatness (and that of our actions) as they are in themselves, by their external appearance, by their number, by their seeming importance — in short, in a fallacious way which reveals to us nothing truly great. And this is because there is nothing truly great save our Lord Jesus Christ. This said, you have at the present moment what seem to be minor occupations; but they are such that your faith will know how to see and esteem them as great in reality. In addition to the work in the house you have the education of Molinari<sup>16</sup> to see to — perhaps this has already begun. Carlo too will gradually become a good clerical student and an exemplary minister of the Lord. Do all you can, then, to form him in spiritual things, looking on him as a soul entrusted to you by God, and treating him with the tenderness of a father. So too with Brother Pietro: you will have the opportunity to give him the charitable attention that his advanced years need; and you will be able

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<sup>16</sup> The cleric, Giacomo Molinari, had been entrusted by the Cardinal of Novara to Loewenbruck so that he might be taught theology. Two years later (in 1830) he began his noviciate with Rosmini, thus becoming the first of his spiritual sons.

to savour the joy of lightening for someone else the trials of old age. Take care also of your converts and of the girl you are instructing so as to bring her back into the Church.

Let us be of one heart and one soul in the Lord, to whom be all honour and glory.

Affectionately yours,

R.

## 49. To Don G.B. Loewenbruck at Domodossola

Rovereto. 25 September 1828

My dear friend and brother,

I gather that you mean to start Molinari on the theology course in October; may the Lord bless your efforts. My thoughts frequently go to you as I consider the trials that you are undergoing: you are used to being among many people, and now you have to endure almost complete solitude. But such were the experiences of the saints—they became accustomed both to solitude and to tumult. If we find solitude painful, it is precisely then that we have to cultivate it, for it means that we have not yet overcome ourselves. It is only when solitude is dear to us that we are ready to go out and mingle with the crowd. 'No one can safely mingle with people except one who gladly remains hidden', says Thomas à Kempis. And the secret of making solitude dear to us is to cultivate it. You know well that this is what the saints teach us.

Here I am little satisfied with myself, for the spiritual exercises that are so dear to me are somewhat disturbed; but the Lord is full of mercy: this is enough, so I am content. I hope to go to Rome in October, and I shall write frequently to you from there. Above all, remain joyful in the Lord; do not tire yourself unduly, and make sure you do not lack anything you need. Put up with it if Pietro's moods vary: it will add to your merits; and as far as possible let the poor old fellow go on in his own fashion. For what in fact can we do about it? You cannot teach an old dog new tricks.

Love me in the Lord. I hope he will help us both until the time comes when we can greet one another affectionately and be together again. Do please help me with your prayers. I have a friend with me here who has heard of you and wants to meet you. Perhaps the Lord will bring this about.

Yours affectionately,

R.



## 50. To Count Giulio Padulli in Milan

Rovereto, feast of St Theresa 1828

I have been with you in spirit through all these days of distractions, but only now can I speak to you by letter. To be united simply in heart is at times enough for friends; and all of us — you, Mellerio, Giovanni and I — know that this union is not lacking; our affection gives its own witness. The greetings of our Roman friend were dear to me: they always savour of paradise. He was good enough to find for me an excellent lodging in the friary of the Holy Apostles: it is just what I need. When you write to him, please assure him that I will take advantage of it as soon as I have my passport, which I await from day to day.

What you tell me about your studies fits in with the nature of such activities: the more we are taken up with them, dragged along by them, the more they weaken and exhaust us if they are prolonged. I have the same experience as you, and I find it better never to prolong concentrated thought to the point where I come away from it enfeebled. For the rest, this experience is useful and beneficial, as you say, in that it makes us feel our wretchedness, makes us realize how this nature of ours is so damaged, and so far removed from the truly noble and sublime things for which it is made that, instead of being strengthened by union with them through the mind, it suffers to the point of illness and even death. This is why the saints had, and still have, a desire for death! It is indeed a heavy load, this body that we carry, this cartload of human weaknesses that we have to drag behind us. It reminds me of what Manzoni said when describing the victims of the plague — a cartload of pestilential flesh! So we can only (as you say yourself so well) humble ourselves more and more, and continually meditate on our fetters and our miserable slavery. Could a branded and flogged slave be proud? And yet man is so foolish that, being in an even worse case, he is in danger (if no more) of growing proud.

May God grant your holy desires as regards your Mariannina (to whom please give my greetings); and may you be able to say to her (like a prophet) about the fruit of her womb:

'May the one you bear in your bosom  
Grow and be reserved to the Lord.'

I cannot tell you anything of importance about my studies; I am divided up among so many things that no one of them makes much progress. I should be well content if what little I accomplish is in accord with the will of God. I hope it is.

I commend to you and Mellerio our friend on the Mount — pray for him. I am impatient to be able to leave. My kindest regards to all my friends, especially those in the Mellerio and Somaglia households. Goodbye.

Yours affectionately,

A.R.

## 51. To Don G.B. Loewenbruck at Domodossola

Rovereto. 15 October 1828

My dear friend and brother in the Lord,

I have received your kind letter of 23 September, and in the meanwhile you will have had mine from the Tyrol ... I am quite sure that (as you say) in dealing with this matter you are even more economical than if you were spending money of your own. But what most concerns me is that you should not suffer during this winter; so I beg and pray you (if I could order you, I would!) not to leave yourself without anything [that you may need] for fear of spending too much. Such a thing would greatly displease me. Spending a few lire more or less does not matter provided that you look after yourself, and above all do not let your health suffer.

I have not yet left for the south, because I am still without my passport. But I expect it to come any day now, and if it arrives in time I shall leave immediately after All Saints. Pray that the angel of the Lord may go with me. Once I get to Rome I will write to you. It was most gratifying to me to hear that you are happy. May the Lord fill your heart with his joy, so that you may serve him with constancy and humility. I am pleased, too, with what you tell me about Don Giovanni, about the retreat he is making and the priest with whom he is making it. May the God of mercies bless them, so that the good and perfect gifts may bear fruit in their souls.

Molinari's health is good, I am glad to hear. See to it that in his heart the seeds of deep piety and an unlimited love of God develop, and that they are nourished by the sacrament of the Body and Blood of the Lamb. I am pleased that he should work at anything you think it good to give him. But let him go on with his studies; and let him engage in them out of love for his neighbour — which is as much as to say, for the love of that Jesus whom we must serve in our brethren. See, too, that the bond of charity unites all those who are companions together in the house. It is a wonderful thing to find a household in which a number of people live, some of low and some of high degree, some with great abilities, some with less, quite different from one another in the eyes of the world, yet all the same seeing one another as children of God, and all equal; where all respect one another — or better, respect in their neighbour the image of Jesus Christ; honouring the seal of baptism and the holiness shared by those who have in common the sacraments! Unfortunately our bodily eyes judge of things in a carnal way. But the eyes of the spirit see that in others the only thing of worth is their adoption by God, and the holiness that is to be found equally in all those who seem so different. I beg you to study particularly how they may be bound together ever more closely by the bonds of charity, so that they may love one another in Christ, support one another, feel for one another, give themselves to one another, forgetting themselves for the sake of others.

And since what I have said has been about love, continue to love me, since my love for you in the Lord is boundless.

A.R.

## 52. To Don Paolo Orsi at Rovereto

Rome, 13 December 1828

My dear Don Paolo,

Here I am, in the great capital of religion. I have come here not out of any will of mine, but because divine Providence made it a necessity. May this good Mother be blessed! Everything here speaks to my heart, and so deeply. One cannot take a step without meeting with some venerable memorial, some sublime monument to religion, some record of its triumph over human power and even over all the genius of man. May the Lord grant that the deep feelings that are aroused in me may conduce to the salvation of my poor soul, which still hesitates between life and death, since it has not yet reached the place of safety. Please pray for me; and if it should happen that I arrive in harbour before you, I shall be eternally grateful to you.

I am well. It has been very mild here since I arrived a fortnight ago. I would ask you to pay a special visit to my dear mother and give her news of me. Write to me with news of your own people and mine, of my relatives and friends, and of our little town — to which I am greatly attached, though I may not appear to be. It gives me great and unaccountable pleasure to hear about it. I am a mountain dweller, and this has left me with a delicate sensibility. What would you? I am almost scrupulous about it; but bear with this as with my other weaknesses. Write to me often. Is Stofella keeping well? Goodbye, my beloved friend.

A.R.

### 53. To Don G.B. Loewenbruck at Domodossola

Rome, Feast of the Epiphany 1829

My dear brother in Jesus Christ,

I received your letter a few days ago, to my great consolation, since it told me that you are happy there over the way things are going. I thank the Lord for sending you the poor young man you speak of so that you can help him over his spiritual needs. To give such help to one soul is worth more than the conquest of a world.

Now I must tell you how things are with me. Personally I am very well and comfortable, since I am staying with the Conventual Franciscans next to the basilica of the Holy Apostles. It is a large house, and there are many people here, including priests from the East who have fled the persecution.

As regards our affairs, this is how things stand: as soon as I arrived I went to see the two Cardinals I know, Cappellari and Zuria. They received me with much kindness, and the former in particular with greater affability than I could have expected. He spoke freely from his heart wanted me to visit him often, not only invited me to dinner but himself took me to the Consistory and presented me to the other Cardinals. He spoke to the Pope about me with such great affection that I can only think it came from God himself, who disposes of men as he pleases. But despite all this, he spoke only in general terms about our business, saying that he wanted to examine it quietly and carefully. At the moment he was heavily engaged, but after Christmas he would be able to let me know the opportune moment. In the meantime he instructed me to confer with two priests for whom he had great esteem, saying that if they gave a favourable verdict this would carry great weight with him. These men were Padre Giovanluca (a Passionist) and Padre Cesarini (an Oratorian). I have visited them both, and so far I am well content with the contact, especially with the former. I regard these two religious as chosen by divine Providence to guide me. I have begun to read to them the *Constitutions*, and we discuss these together. As far as I can tell from our preliminary conferences, the two seem to take a favourable view. But you will see from what I have said that after a month in Rome I am still completely in the dark about the whole matter. I have not had a chance of speaking again with Cardinal Cappellari — and he is the one I depend on most. So our chief resources are *patience* and *prayer* we must remember that everything depends on these weapons, especially at the start, when nothing can be achieved without them, even if divine Providence means to bring about our design: things are always slow in the beginning, and there are bound to be delays and hitches. When these occur we have to be resigned, and restrain everything in us which comes of human impetuosity. For one of the defects of human nature — a result of sin — is precisely hurry and impatience. The Lord often wants to cure this vice of ours by causing us to meet with

occasions of trial and times of waiting. From the account I have given you of the situation you will realize that since I have no idea of what is going on at the heart of things, much less do I know anything of what is to come of the project that came to my mind, and that I told you about in Milan. Over this, since it is something concerning an uncertain future, I believe we must make no plans at all, in accord with our Constitutions, which say: 'We must occupy our thoughts only with what is present and certain, resting tranquilly in these things and trying through them to please the Lord, who is to be found in all circumstances. Holding to this with lively faith, it must not enter our minds to seek anything else'; and also: 'We must always prefer things present and certain, rather than those which are uncertain and belong to the future. We are not anxious about these, but leave them in the Lord's hands, relying on his sweetly-working Providence, to which our lives should be abandoned.' In the spirit of this rule, and basing my reflections on what is certain at present, I think I shall be able to return to Calvario after Easter, or whenever the matter is settled. There I shall be able to lead the life that it seems is the Lord's will for me, according to the Constitutions that we have written. From this you can also gather my view about what you tell me of your desire to come to Rome, the capital of the Catholic world. I can well understand how great and reasonable that desire is: if I were in your situation I should feel the same. Also I hope in the Lord that the time will come when you can satisfy that desire, without it being necessary to depart in any way from the regularity of our manner of life. This is because I foresee that the time may come when you will be able to make this journey for reasons of charity, or rather for spiritual needs. But given what I consider to be the case at present, I believe that you have to make a sacrifice to the Lord — one which he will find most pleasing — by renouncing this journey; since if he has determined that we are to do anything however small, we certainly have to begin by making sacrifices. Make this sacrifice, then: it is a small example of what we shall have to suffer by way of mortifications for his sake in the future, if he regards us as worthy to do so. If then there arises any need for you to come here, such that the reason for your journey can be explained to his satisfaction to the Cardinal of Novara, I will write to you about it, and also to the Cardinal. On the other hand if such a necessity does not arise before my return, this will be a sure sign that the Lord wants you to remain at Calvario, attending to the good works in which you are engaged, and sanctifying yourself ever more with spiritual exercises, while listening to and meditating on the voice of God in that solitude in which the Lord speaks to the heart. In this way your quiet perseverance and your prolonged mortification will be commendable not only in God's eyes but also in those of men, who will be able to see that we make it our concern not to pay attention simply to our own inclinations, but to follow the dictates of reason, with perseverance, simplicity and trust, not having our own interests in view but rather intent on meeting — diligently and devotedly — the obligations we have taken on. If you were to leave there without necessity it would mean interrupting for a time Molinari's studies, a charge specifically entrusted to you by the Cardinal, on the understanding that

you would be remaining there permanently. So too Carlo would lack your support; your good works would cease; and there would be much speculation among the local people about the reason for your departure. All these things we ought to avoid if possible. Still, if you do not agree with my reasoning, write to me out of the friendship which binds us together (in a union which is close in the Lord), and with the freedom which ought to be found between brothers who are close to one another, as we are — in one faith, in one love, in one Father, and in one Lord, Jesus Christ. I recommend myself to your prayers: of your charity ask God to bring about a real conversion in me, and the repentance which I owe to him for my offences. Get Molinari and Carlo to pray for me too and offer their communions for me. I am most grateful for the Masses which you tell me you have offered for me. I have for a long time celebrated Mass specially for you and me, so that the Lord may help us, and that we may do only his will, not our own. Love me, and be sure that in me you have one who loves you from his heart in our Lord. May the grace of God fill you and console you. Amen.

Your unworthy servant,

A.R.

## 54. To Don G.B. Loewenbruck at Domodossola

Rome, 10 February 1829

My dear friend,

The Holy Father is dead. He was very fond of me, more than I can say; but he is dead. It was the will of God — may he be blessed. I do not know how this event will affect our affairs, but let us remain tranquil in the Lord and abandon ourselves wholly to him.

I have received your welcome letter, and was much comforted to see your constancy; and certainly we are in great need of the patience and serenity of the saints. Let us wait on the Lord and serve him in faith. He comes to those who look to him for support. The news of your three companions has also consoled me: carry on, then, with your holy work, and conduct yourself with prudence, because *the enemy goes about seeking whom he may devour*. Let us not be presumptuous in any way, and for the moment we must both remain where the Lord has placed us: let us not anticipate his will. Simply for the glory of God, I must tell you that, of the two people who have examined our project, one has given his full approval and speaks greatly in its favour; the other has not yet completed his examination. For the present, then, everything will remain suspended. Let us pray urgently for a good outcome of the election of the Head of the Church, and remain content with our littleness, and with our hermit existence. Let the anchorites of old be our models — for you especially, since you really are in a state of solitude. It was in this way that all the saints prepared themselves; the same spirit of obscurity and contemplation must fill us, and then we shall become just what the Lord wants us to be. Today I am writing in haste: I will write at greater length another time. Give my greetings to your dear companions. Goodbye.

Yours,

Serbati

## 55. To Don G.B. Loewenbruck at Domodossola

Rome, 28 February 1829

My beloved friend in the Lord: grace and peace,

I thank God that, as I see from your welcome letter, things up there are going well. I saw Cardinal Morozzo the day before yesterday, and he showed himself pleased with the efforts you have put into your various good works, and particularly that for the women prisoners at Pallanza. He told me that he has seen the house at Monte Calvario after the restorations and is very satisfied with the result. Then he said to me: 'And are you now thinking of returning to your diocese?' I replied that that was precisely my wish; I told him how our little project was making very good progress, and how Pope Leo [XII] was very favourably disposed towards it, when divine Providence called him into the next life. I added that I was awaiting the election of the new Sovereign Pontiff, so as not to multiply needlessly journeys and expense, and that I wished to submit our small plan to whoever Providence gave us [as Pope], so that the Head of the Church might be the first to pass a judgement on it, and that his verdict might furnish us with sure guidance for our future activities. He seemed to be satisfied with this, and it is possible that in his charity he may say a word in our favour, and so bring things to a [speedier] conclusion.

So let us leave everything in the hands of our Redeemer, Jesus, and those of our Blessed Lady his Mother; and on our part remain tranquil and steadfast, with a lively faith in him, certain that he will dispose things for his greater glory, and that he will not leave us without guidance, to the end that we may securely attain our aim, the salvation of souls. At this time I can offer up Mass for no other intention than for ourselves and our project, that God may bring about our salvation in the best way possible and provide for the Church, his beloved Spouse, won with his blood. I beg you to pray fervently — as I am sure you will — for the same intention; and particularly that I may put no obstacle to the divine mercy through my transgressions. Obtain also the prayers of our three dear brothers in the Lord, Antonio, Carlo and Isala. I am so glad to know that they are making progress in perfection: in obedience and in love of the observance of a devout, regular life. Who knows if the Lord may not call them all to be entirely his own in the religious life? I urge you to love them as yourself, and not to spare towards them any of the maternal charity of our divine Master. If you use in their regard the tender solicitude of a mother, and in due course they consecrate themselves to God, you will be able to regard them as your own children in the Lord!

I assure you, my dear friend and brother in Jesus, that I am longing for the moment when I can be with you; but as yet I do not think it is near; and since it is our desire to live truly in dependence on Providence, looking always to God,



who disposes everything for our good and that of his Church, we must bear patiently this present separation.

Let us see ourselves now, my dear friend, as novices, with God as our Master. He wants to accustom us to mortification and make us ready to accept any state, office or place; and this is why he allows us to be apart for a time. So let us submit to the discipline of our Master. We need to form the habits he wants us to form; and lest we should take on too much, let us conform ourselves to the will of our good and loving Master, not anticipating it. He is gradually testing us, purifying us, and mortifying us; if we are weak he will support us with his hand, as long as we follow not our own notions but the indications of his adorable Providence. I must confess that I am ashamed to speak to you in this way, because I am conscious that I, alas, am doing nothing; but I can do no less than express these sentiments, because I am sure you will relish them, and through the grace the Lord gives you, will acknowledge their truth in your heart. It is certain that before a man called to religion can become a religious, he must be a novice, and remain one for some time. For you, at least, this is the time of noviceship. I only made a beginning last year on my noviciate, but the Lord, when he pleases, will see that I complete it. Truly, for the rest, there is no lack of suffering (or of the likelihood of it), in body, and especially in spirit; and I count this among the greatest blessings of the Lord. So for my part I say to you: persevere, and do not leave the noviciate of your own accord; allow only Jesus, through divine Providence, to draw you out from there or send you back, at his pleasure.' And when all is said and done, what is the whole of this life but a noviciate for heaven?

As for the accounts: let me, my dear friend, say something that may or may not be true. I say it only to open my heart to you frankly, to hide nothing of what I owe you in fraternal charity. If what I say is true, profit by it if not, take no notice of it: act as though I had never said it. Well then, it appeared to me that in the case of all the estimates I asked you for, you felt a certain fear of naming a large sum such as might dismay me; and therefore, through this timidity, you sent me estimates that fell considerably short of what you really needed for the business in hand. But let me say that if the sum is great, I shall not be alarmed, provided that it is within my means. It is necessary that I should always know the whole truth, so that I can make my arrangements and dispose things so that I can have the money ready at the time when it is needed. So it is best that you should tell me at the outset exactly what you believe is needed, and take no thought concerning my reaction. For in this way you will be showing the frankness which is altogether necessary in a Christian; and by telling the whole truth you will show that you trust in God, not in man, and that you abandon yourself to divine Providence. If we can achieve a good purpose with all frankness, then it is willed by God: let us try to attain this. But if we can only succeed in our purpose through some economy with the truth, then it is not willed by God — and so we should not wish it. Zeal should never have the effect of making us less sincere and open in all our dealings. I should

be unworthy to be your companion, my dear friend, and you would do well to reject me, if I should ever draw back from carrying out a good work through love of money. On the other hand, I should be lacking in prudence if (as the gospel puts it) I were not to *sit down and work out what the necessary costs would be*. However, if in fact my misgivings are without foundation, and you really made your estimates too low by accident or through a mistake, I take back all that I have said, and I ask you to pardon me because of the lively desire I have that we should walk in the light, united in heart before the Lord.

Continue to love me in Christ, and bear with me. Be assured that you are always in my heart, especially when I am before the altar. Greet for me Molinari and your other two companions. Give my affectionate good wishes to Canon Capis, as also to the attorney, Chiossi, to Pietro, to the archpriest, and to all who enquire about me.

A.R.

## 56. To Don G.B. Loewenbruck at Domodossola

Rome, 17 March 1829

My dear friend and brother in the Lord — grace and peace,

I received yesterday your welcome letter. I can well believe that you will feel it a sore loss to be deprived of your usual opportunities of preaching; but the time will come when God will compensate you abundantly for every mortification you suffer. It is enough if we work for him alone: he rewards us generously.

At present I am engaged in working towards a reform of philosophy: I wish to formulate a Christian philosophy; and by this I mean not a philosophy mingled with the mysteries of religion, but a sound philosophy, one which is both solidly based and also certain to provide a climate favourable to religion, to offer a means of combating false and presumptuous philosophies, and to furnish the basis of a comprehensive and satisfying theology.

As soon as the new Pope is elected I shall, I hope, be able to treat further of our affair. You will find it hard to believe how kindly Pope Leo listened to my account of our plan; humanly speaking, he seemed inclined to crown it with the approval of the Apostolic See. But God has reserved it to someone else to reach a verdict on what we have in mind.

There are only rumours about the conclave, and no one knows how much foundation these have. If they are to be believed, Cardinal Pacca was to have been the first choice; but when he was not elected, many turned to De Gregorio. But now it seems that the support for him has lessened. My own heart favours Cappellari for Pope. What a lot we already owe to this Cardinal! Before he went into the conclave he told me, with his usual kindness, I shall be taking your document (the manuscript I had given him) with me into the conclave, and I will get others in there to read it.

My dear friend, let us stand firm in God, without doubt or hesitation, *nihil haesitans* [with no drawing back]; let us wait in faith: *sustine Dominum* [wait for the Lord]. Because God has no greater means of teaching us men than that of making us wait. Our great defect is excessive haste — it is a wise man who knows how to wait.

Let us love each other like disciples: it is what our Master wants of us. Greet everyone for me with a holy kiss'. Don Andrea, who is with me, also wishes to be remembered to you. Goodbye.

Affectionately yours,

Rosmini

## 57. To Don Sebastiano de Apollonia at Udine

Rome, Holy Saturday 1829

My dear friend in the Lord,

[In the first part of this letter Rosmini speaks of the death of Gioia, whose doctrines he had refuted in his writings. He hopes that Gioia abandoned his erroneous moral teachings before he died. (Unknown to Rosmini, Gioia did in fact retract his views on his death-bed.) Rosmini then goes on:]

I am very grateful for the charity of your prayers: God will reward you. Continue them, I beg you, *ne forte cum aliis praedicaverim, ipse reprobus efficiar* [lest after preaching to others, I myself may be rejected.] That is a thought that makes me tremble... my pen shakes in my hand. How often I wish I could weep for my sins, and yet I find my eyes dry .. the thought of appearing before the tribunal of God horrifies me when I consider my wretchedness. Seeing that I never amend my ways has the effect, on the one hand, of making me want to see soon the end of my days (so that I may not go on increasing the weight of my guilt); while on the other, the prospect of facing my death (which the feebleness of my body makes me think may not be far away) fills me with fear because of the uncertain state of my soul. My only refuge from these tortures... is to turn my gaze to my crucified Saviour, to hide myself in his wounds... or in the folds of the mantle of our Blessed Lady, his Mother and mine. Mary! Jesus! These indeed are the two powerful names which give rise in me to endless hope, and which (even when at times I find myself deeply disturbed on account of my failure to advance in the way of perfection, and because of my uncertainty over what really lies concealed in the depths of my heart, where God alone can see, until that day when everything in us is revealed) yield me a profound calm, together with a consolation which smiles at me in the midst of this fearful sadness ... How happy I should be if the author of grace would reign in me, as he, the author also of nature, reigns and works within the inanimate part of his creation — I mean with the same perfection and completeness, finding no hindrance to his action through my inner malice and the innate depravity of my nature! How happy I should be if God, who alone is life, were my life, my soul: if he could be within me so that I should be annihilated in him — or rather so that my nothingness could be absorbed into his all; so that I could be transformed into him.

Ah, my dear friend, if you love me, if we are one in that Lord in whom all that live have their being, pray yet more fervently for me so that I may look to see his great mercy. And when I speak of his great mercy I have in mind not passing things (which themselves are still mercies from the Lord), but the mercy that can produce a real change for the better in my bad habits, unite my heart and all of me to him — in short bring about the saving of my soul, my attaining to that eternal salvation in which all my hopes will be fulfilled and

utterly satisfied for ever. *Get the pious souls known to you to pray for the same intention. Time is short: the passing moments are precious; so let us use them to make sure of our salvation. I should never finish if I tried to tell you what profound importance I attach to these thoughts; so instead I will trust myself to your own feelings — which I am sure are far greater than pen and ink can express.*

*Please help me, for should I succeed in reaching heaven before you, I promise that I will show my gratitude in every way I can... shall be near the fount of all good, and this will enable me to do something for you...*

*But now I must end. What I have written will be enough to move your love for me... Goodbye.*

Your Rosmini

## 58. To Don G.B. Loewenbruck at Domodossola

Rome, 23 April 1829

My dear brother and friend in the Lord,

As regards the new Pope: I knew Pius VIII from 1823, when he was a Cardinal; and once I was back in Rome I renewed the acquaintance before he entered the conclave. He was a friend of Mellerio's, and after his election he commissioned Mgr Polidori to write to the Count to announce his elevation. If I had wanted to use human means, it would have been very easy to invoke his interest in ways that (humanly speaking) would have been very helpful. But this is far from my intention. With God's help I want to go ahead tranquilly, to receive only what the Lord may already have destined [for us], using only natural and allowable means, with patience and resignation [to the divine will]. I want to have peace of conscience, and to have no reason to doubt whether what happens to me is the result of my own action rather than that of divine Providence. If I thought that instead of looking to God for everything I had depended on myself, it would cause me grave disquiet and consternation. By contrast, I should feel encouraged and full of joyful hope if I could be sure that I was engaged in a work, not out of any will of my own, but simply through the will and disposition of God. If this were the case, even in the midst of my own feebleness and wretchedness, I should feel consoled and restored to confidence at the thought that God, who had laid this burden on my shoulders, would certainly give me the strength to bear it. It is part of his goodness to be with us in every difficulty and quandary that we meet with, when we have acted simply in accord with his divine and adorable will. So it is this that I seek: this that I put my trust in.

Cardinal Morozzo has spoken well of us here in Rome, and he told me that he will personally mention us to the Pope. So we must be patient and persevere in prayer, my dear friend in the Lord, knowing that when two or three are united and of one will in asking a favour of the Lord, he will give them all that they ask. I will say no more about our affairs at the moment, because I do not think it would be wise; so please do not be put out by my reticence. For the rest, you will have a good idea of how things stand from what I have already said.

I am much consoled at the thought of the good you are doing — may God bless your labours, and infuse his spirit of love into all those who listen to your words. I embrace you lovingly in the Lord, who is our salvation and peace.

A.R.

## 59. To Count Giacomo Mellerio in Milan

Rome. 16 May 1829

My dear friend,

[Rosmini first sympathizes with Mellerio over the fatal illness of his niece, and praises the Count's virtue and willingness to shoulder the crosses that God sends.]

... Yesterday I had an audience with the Pope, and asked his blessing for you and Padulli, and all our friends in Milan. This he gave with great cordiality, and I trust this will be as consoling for you as it was for me. He also said things that showed both wisdom and true divine enlightenment, or so it seemed to me.

But all the signs are that I shall have to remain here for quite some time yet and that my affairs will go ahead only very slowly. This cannot be helped. All those I have consulted have been unanimous in saying that my idea truly comes from above, and so will be realized — but as and when God so wills. And this is my belief too. The Lord alone knows the times and the moments, and holds them in his power. And nothing could be better: I find the greatest happiness in waiting on the Lord. and conforming myself to his holy and divine will.

The Pope also encouraged me to write books, assuring me that this is what God wants of me; and he advised me to give as little time as possible to other occupations of the active life. This counsel leaves me entirely at peace over my plan. The verdict of the Pope could not have been more spontaneous, or from a better source. I have always felt that I should not abandon my studies, but simply combine other activities with them as far as possible. Now I have no more doubts, and I shall go ahead 'with my eyes shut', so to speak<sup>17</sup> I have a work on philosophy in the press just now which will run to three volumes. Since I have to remain here, I think this should go well.

Don Luigi should have received my last letter some time back, unless it went astray. Please give my greetings to our friends and commend me to the Lord. Believe me, I am now and (I trust) always shall be —Your friend,

R.

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<sup>17</sup> It is clear from this letter, from the one that follows immediately, and from the three noted below, that Rosmini received the mission to write philosophical works from Christ's Vicar himself. In confirmation of this. see also what Rosmini writes in his *Introduction to Philosophy*. (n.1 1)

The other letters referred to above are: No.158, to Don Pietro Orsi (25 May, 1829); No.207, to the Bishop of Trent (23 December 1830); and No.257, to Pope Gregory XVI (10 January 1832). Of these, No.158 is not included in this selection, but can be found in E.C. No.988. Most of No.207 is included here; and No.257 can be found in E.C. No.1588.

## 60. To Don G.B. Loewenbruck at Domodossola

Rome, 23 May 1829

My dear brother and friend in Jesus Christ,

I am writing to tell you of my audience with Pope Pius VIII a week ago, when I was introduced by a Cardinal who is kindly disposed towards me. The Pope was in good health and was most gracious. After I had paid my respects he spoke of the books I had presented to him, and showed that he already knew some writings of mine and had read them. He intimated to me that I should continue to apply myself to the sort of literary labours that I am at present engaged in, and he used words so flattering that I should blush to repeat them.

After this he spoke of the project which we share, of which he had already received a favourable account, especially from Cardinal Morozzo. This is what he said to me (and I put down his actual words, so that they may serve as the rule for our future conduct) — 'If you are thinking of beginning in a small way and leaving the rest to the Lord, *we approve*, and are well content that you should do this. But if you have any thoughts of starting on a large scale, we do not think this is advisable. In saying this, we speak not so much as the Vicar (though unworthy) of Jesus Christ, but simply in view of the times and circumstances we are living in.'

Here the Holy Father began to speak of a congregation which for a time had done much good, because it had contented itself with remaining small, and had no wish to stretch itself over many things. But this congregation afterwards had set itself on a different course, wishing to expand and do great things; and it then failed to live up to the expectations it had at first aroused. The Pope went on at some length to show me the need for humility and prudence ... stressing how it is necessary in all such works to begin in a small way and leave the Lord to give the increase, according to times and places and his good pleasure, without our proposing to do great things, but rather remaining content to do simply what little we could, fully content with that. All that the Holy Father said to me was full of the spirit of God and of the wisdom and unction that comes from above. I was greatly consoled by all this, because the Pope, without knowing it, was giving voice precisely to my own thoughts — the ideas that I have always had in my inmost heart, and which form the basis of our plan.

I replied to him pretty much in these terms: 'Holy Father, I do not know how the matter has been put to you, but I can assure you of this: that I have never had any thought of starting with any great undertaking, but only of working in a quite small way. My vocation is not something extraordinary, as was that of St Ignatius; but only a very ordinary one. My sole purpose in having recourse to your Holiness was to know and be well assured that in taking the path I have



followed so far I was on the right lines ... whether to continue like this or to abandon the idea.' He turned to me and said: '*You are on the right path*;' do indeed continue in it, as long as you proceed as we have recommended, starting in a very small way and leaving the rest to the Lord. For if the work is of God, he will not fail to support it.'

At this point I asked for the Holy Father's blessing, on yourself and on all the others at Domodossola, as well as on our friends and benefactors. He gave it, gladly and cordially, and his manner when I left was full of apostolic charity.

I wanted to give you an exact account of all this, so that you could see that we now know, directly from the mouth of the Vicar of Christ, what rule must guide our conduct: first, that we shall be on the right lines, and be doing the will of God, if we go on as we have been doing, and as we intend to do in the future; and second, that our main guiding principle (given to us now by God himself through the mouth of his Vicar) is that which we have already proposed to ourselves: that is, to trample underfoot all human ambition and inordinate zeal; to make sure that our imagination does not run away with us and deceive us into proposing grandiose schemes; but instead to wish only to serve the Lord in our small way —that is, using the small means that he has granted to us. We shall live contentedly in obscurity, intent on sanctifying ourselves, and valuing every means of serving God, whether small or great whether it is in the public gaze or not Perseverance, then, (since we have the approval of the visible Head of the Church), along with seriousness and firmness, warned as we have been by God's representative, against the danger into which we could fall, through the devil's deceits, if we gave way to the temptation to attempt by our own efforts to extend our activities beyond our humble state.

Such was the outcome of my audience with the Pope; and this is the profit we must draw from it. After this meeting, which left me full of interior happiness and tranquillity, I asked the Cardinal with whom I am best acquainted what I should do: return at once to Domodossola, or remain in Rome. His answer was that I needed to prolong my stay, and that I must put together a summary of the Constitutions, so as to present it to the Congregation for Bishops and Regulars, so that it may be examined and, please God, approved. I hope too that we may be granted indulgences for our church at Domodossola, for ourselves and for all those who may contribute, directly or indirectly, to the development of the good work. So I shall stay on for the present and continue with the books which will be useful to us for the reform of ecclesiastical studies. The Pope expressly enjoined on me the writing of books, and this made me understand that this is the will of God in my regard. He said to me: 'You must not extend yourself in the labours of the active life: rather, you must write.' And he confirmed this with words that were emphatic and full of charity. I will do as he says, then, for such is the will of God for the present.

I am glad to know that you are pleased with my idea that in the beginning we should confine ourselves (as far as external works are concerned) to giving the Spiritual Exercises in seminaries, and to other work to do with the training of the clergy when these are asked of us. I have produced one book which will be useful in this connection, and will provide others. Above all, though, we must pray earnestly and seek the sanctification of our souls, so that this is our one desire and the fulfilment of all our ambitions. This is the way in which we shall find real tranquillity and constancy in all we do. Of your kindness, remember me specially before God, for while I am preaching to others, I am only a poor sinner myself. Still, the Lord, who has given me the earnest desire of becoming holy, will crown his work with fulfilment. And then I will say with all my heart *Nunc dimittis*. Greet Molinari for me — I love him in the Lord — and our other two brothers also. Remember me to our good friend Canon Capis. Tell him that he is continually in my thoughts, and that I look forward to seeing him again. Say also that I am grateful to him for his kindness to yourself and your companions, and ask him to pray for me. Goodbye. Let us be *one heart and one soul in the Lord*.

A.R.

## 61. To Count Giulio Padulli In Milan

Rome, 6 June 1829

My beloved Giulio,

... I read the work by Lammenais, and you have very good reason to be critical of it. He concedes too much to the Liberals, for he makes the reasonableness of the command the motive for obeying it. This means the end of all real obedience. What we have to ask is not whether the command is reasonable, but whether obedience itself is reasonable. As regards the command, it is enough for us if we know, first, that it is given by a legitimate authority; and, second, that it does not clash with a higher command. In case of doubt the presumption must favour the one who commands with legitimate authority. It is true that in any system the Pope is never infallible in political matters; so how am I to know for certain that a command of his in such matters is in conformity with reason — the condition demanded by Lammenais? He himself is aware of this difficulty. But how does he reply? In his first letter to the Archbishop of Paris he contents himself with saying: 'If the command given by ecclesiastical authority is unreasonable or mistaken, the authority itself loses all validity; for it is the nature of ecclesiastical authority to have force only as long as it is conformable with reason.' Many thanks! You see, we have gone back to private judgement ... and the sort of private judgement that when it is so pleased, declares ecclesiastical authority to be null and void. Oh yes, he is very obedient; it is not that he refuses to obey; he always obeys —except in the cases where he declares that the authority giving the command does not exist. Is this not perfect obedience? How true it is that extremes meet, and if you go round a circle in the opposite direction from that taken by someone else who starts from the same point as yourself, you will soon meet and be together again.

However, I am much consoled by your studies. I know that the devil puts his oar in everywhere he finds an opportunity. But it is sufficient to give him the answer that St Gregory made to the temptation the devil put to him while he was writing his *Moralia*. He realized that the work was turning out to be great and noble — which it is — and that vanity was making him feel pleased with himself, and he saw that the devil was suggesting to him: 'Burn the work, so as to conquer your vanity.' But he realized that this counsel came from the one who is full of hate and only wishes to destroy. So he replied: 'I did not begin this work for your sake: neither will I end it for your sake.' And he then went back to his labour, freed from the temptation. This is how we must act: so let us work cheerfully —but for God, and for him alone. Let his holy law be the light of our thoughts, and the words of the gospel the end of our speculations, with Jesus Christ as our Master, first and last. It is he who has the words of eternal life: blessed are those who meditate on them, who have them in their

heart and mind ... whose study and research have no other aim but to conform their minds to them, correcting and emending their ideas by comparison with them as by a certain norm, so as to give life to all their knowledge by these words.

Let everything be done so that God may be glorified in Jesus, to whom I wish you to be conformed in all things. Neither have I any better wish for all those whom I love in him and for him.

Goodbye, and give my greetings also to Mellerio and the others.

Rosmini

## 62. To Don Paolo Barola<sup>18</sup> In Milan

Rome, 17 July 1829

My beloved Don Paolo,

I greatly appreciated your short letter and the fact that you wrote to me on the feast of a saint who was on fire with God's pure light. Ask for just one spark of it for me - that would be enough to set off a great blaze. We shall be greatly blessed if we are granted such a spark, and this is something I hope for from the Lord and from the prayers of my very dear Don Paolo. This charity of your prayers is the very greatest kindness you can show me, and you know what the intention is: that I may be finally converted to the Lord. I have no other desire in this world, and if you will implore it for me I shall be eternally grateful to you.

I will write to Cardinal Cappellari about the matter, and shall be very glad to see you meet with success, if that is God's will. You will be able to do a great deal of good, since if things are clarified in peoples minds, all will be set right, with God's help. But if their ideas are mistaken, what is to be done? *If the light that is in you is darkness, how great will the darkness be?* Truly, in these times even common sense has been lost So it is a real work of piety to rekindle the light that has been put out — or at least try to do so. So set about this work then, of dealing with philosophy as an introduction to religion. For if it does not serve this purpose it is valueless.

All here ask me to send you their greetings and their invitations. Since I hope we shall soon be together I will add no more, apart from a fond embrace in the Lord Jesus.

Affectionately and gratefully yours,

A. Rosmini

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<sup>18</sup> Don Paolo Barola was secretary to Cardinal Pacca and professor of moral philosophy in the College of Propaganda. (See *Vita di Antonio Rosmini* Vol. I, p.339.)

### 63. To Giacomo Molinari at Domodossola

Rome, 19 September 1829

My dear brother in Jesus Christ,

Your letter gave me great pleasure, and the news you give me of Calvario fills me with spiritual consolation. It has made me long for the time when I can join you there. Be sure that, as far as I can, I try to hasten the moment — I would fly there at once if this were possible. But I must do God's will, and I believe that he wants me to remain here for a time, so as not to leave unfinished the affairs we have begun.

I thank God for the catechetical work you are doing and which (you tell me) he is blessing. There really is nothing finer or more pleasing to God than the evangelizing of the poor. Let us see to it that this work is neither neglected nor interrupted. My dear Molinari, pray earnestly to the Lord, and redouble your fervour, so that he may direct everything, and so that we may carry out his adorable will and serve him, without making a single mistaken move. It is when we persevere in prayer and in humble service given to God in our neighbour that we can hope to receive the enlightenment and the strength to go on working. May all that we do be made holy by the Passion of Jesus Christ, which should be the most precious food of our souls, together with the Sorrows of our Lady — which are, so to speak, an extension of those of her Son. Pray then, let us both pray. Every morning I offer the holy sacrifice solely for us all. God listens to the prayer in which we are united.

I embrace you in the Lord.

Yours affectionately,

R.

## 64. To Count Giacomo Mellerio In Milan

Rome, 10 October 1829

My dear friend,

By all means give Manzoni my work if you like. I am quite willing to let him have the book, because he has several claims on me: in due course he can give me some valuable suggestions; and he was kind enough to have me read *I Promessi Sposi* before it was published, so I owe him a favour in return.

Here [in Rome] there seem to be great expectations as regards my work, and they grow from day to day. Will this help me or harm me? We shall see what the outcome is. Cardinal Nembrini wants it at all costs, even in its present imperfect state; he came to see me; he treated me as if I were one of the great teachers of the world! On what is all this founded? I am sure I do not know. Only a few passages have been read by a few people. I have explained very few of my ideas here, for I live the life of a hermit. My *Opuscoli* [minor works] themselves have not been read by many, though plenty of people talk about them. However it may be, we shall see where all this chattering ends. The Lord knows that I work for him, and that I want nothing else but to be of help in spreading one sole sort of knowledge: *I know nothing except Christ, and him crucified*. My whole spirit and will, my nature too, have only this aim. Pray that I may not be deceived in believing this; for what can we say for certain about ourselves in this life? *Man knows not whether he is deserving of praise or blame*. These terrible words are always before my eyes, and they make me tremble like a leaf; while the sight of my countless sins is like a wind which suddenly springs up and shakes me even more.

Goodbye. Continue to pray for me without ever growing weary —for me and for the project in Domodossola, that the Lord may do only what is pleasing to him. 'Farewell, farewell in the Lord Jesus Christ'.

Antonio Rosmini

## 65. To Count Raffaello Padulli in Milan

Rome, 13 October 1829

My very dear Raffaello,

Thank you very much for remembering me, a most wretched sinner, before Mary our Mother at Loreto; and I ask the same charity of you every time you receive Holy Communion ... Ask God that I may be enabled to get back on the right road, and by correcting my many defects, become truly all his. There is nothing else in the world that I wish, for I am extremely poor, and far from what I ought to be and want to be.

You speak of the counsels I have given you: certainly, as far as the words go, they were good, because I have a whole book of them, and they are infallible (I mean the gospel). But when it comes to actions, my dear Raffaello, I am worth very little indeed. Knowledge is one thing: doing is another matter; it is all very well to talk putting what one knows into practice is a different story. What use is it to know? To teach? What really matters is to judge oneself truly, in the light of those frightening words: *You wicked servant, I condemn you out of your own mouth*. Certainly, if I were to think only on these lines I should despair. But God is infinitely merciful; so there is mercy even for me — it is in this thought that I find support. Enable my hope to be such that it is not deluded — obtain this by your prayers. And what I ask of you I ask also of our dear Matteo, of Don Giovanni, Don Giulio, and of all those true friends of mine who share the same sentiments as we; that is, the wish to be together for all eternity.

Goodbye. I will say no more this time; the rest I will write to Don Giovanni and Don Giulio. Give my warm greetings in our Lord to Matteo.

Your Rosmini



## 66. To Don G.B. Loewenbruck at Domodossola

Rome, 19 October 1829

My dear friend and brother in Jesus Christ,

Our friend in Milan is very pleased that you intend to remain where you are, and I too thank the Lord from my heart, since your decision was made without any direct action of mine, and because circumstances, arranged by divine Providence, have so disposed matters. So again thanks to our good God. I believe that what has happened and what will happen in the future is a confirmation of his will that we should be steadfast and persevering in serving him on the holy Mount! We must put all our hopes in him alone; and although our friend seems to be willing, at need, to contribute money to our undertaking, let us make no plans over this, and act as though he had said nothing about any such intention. For in this way we shall base all that we do on the present and on what is certain (as is our resolve), rather than depend on an uncertain future. My dear friend, this is a golden rule to preserve our peace of mind and constancy: to harbour no human hopes and never make any schemes dependent on these, but instead to live by the day, basing ourselves on what is actual; and for the rest abandoning ourselves entirely into God's hands.

As regards the decision you have taken of going to the help of the poor of Formazza, I admire and praise you for it, and thank you with all my heart: for you are truly doing a good deed, and I hope this is the work of the Holy Spirit — may he fill you and possess you. I can well see how arduous this undertaking of yours will be in the winter weather; but if you have decided on it through divine love, I am confident that God will help you and protect you at all times. And I, unworthy as I am, if I can do nothing else, will pray that you may carry out well in the sight of God the holy work which you have taken on for love of him ... I am mindful of what you will have to suffer, and I feel great sympathy for you; but God will reward you for all that you do for his sake: no slightest thing that we do for him is done in vain. For my part, believe me, I long to be with you and to add my weak efforts so as to contribute to your work in some small way, with God's help. [In the *Epistolario Completo*, though not in the *Epistolario Ascetico* edition of this letter, Rosmini continues: 'But as I wrote earlier to you, it is absolutely necessary for me to stay here a little longer so as to finish the business I have begun; since to leave it incomplete would cause great harm. But the moment it is finished I will leave; and this, I am sure, will be before next spring.']

Continue to love me in the Lord, and work in union with him, with the prudence of the serpent and the simplicity of the dove. Pray for me, who love you dearly in Christ, our Saviour and our all. Greet Molinari warmly for me, and your other two companions. Also give my best wishes to our dear Canon, and assure him

that I shall be coming; ask him, too, to pray for me and for all of us. Give my regards to all those who know me and enquire about me. Goodbye.

A. Rosmini

## 67. To Don G.B. Loewenbruck at Domodossola

Rome, 17 December 1829

My dear friend,

We must not only behave blamelessly before God, but we must also be both frank with people and answerable to them. We have to act with complete simplicity, sincerity and prudence. Our simplicity will mean that we shall abandon ourselves to God, and through our trust in him we shall not be afraid of being wholly truthful, even in matters which may involve humiliation for ourselves. The mortification this may cause us will be pleasing to God. But prudence will lead us to ensure that we can give good reasons for all that we do, so that people will have no justification to despise us or to accuse us of naivety because we seem to expect them to believe us on trust. Nor must we lay ourselves open to the charge of presumption, as if we made out that what we say ought to be believed simply on our own authority. We need to imitate, in this as in everything else, our divine Master, and show a proper caution. He always wished his words to be believed on evidence, on the evidence of his miracles and all the other signs that confirmed what he said; he also called to witness his heavenly Father, who backed up his sayings by prophecies and signs. *If I do not the works of my Father then do not believe me.* And it has often occurred to me that the reason why our Lady did not tell Joseph about the apparition of the angel to her was that she had no proof to offer him, and was so humble that she did not expect to be believed on the strength of her word alone. Let her conduct, then, be the model for ours, my friend. Let us never tell people of anything of which we cannot offer manifest proof; then they will have no reason to accuse us. After all, Jesus Christ said: *Beware of men.*

Forgive me, my dear friend and brother, if I seem to dwell overlong on these maxims. I believe that if God, in his hidden designs, means our joint actions to bring into being a body of persons to serve his purposes, the outcome of what this society does will depend upon the *maxims* which we establish in the beginning. This is why I regard it as of supreme importance that we should give our minds seriously to knowing and adopting in conformity with the Holy Spirit the maxims we ought to be governed by... Let us proceed with simplicity of spirit and perseverance, and let us not be afraid if we receive humiliations from the hands of God, since it is through humiliations that the eyes of the spirit are opened, faith is stimulated, hope is strengthened, and the love of God burns in us. These are the graces which he gives to those who are humbled.

I hear that Molinari will soon be ordained deacon: thanks be to God. One or two possible subjects have approached me here, but I will tell you about that when we are together. We must be patient and live in peace of mind, looking into our own souls. For a long while I have been wanting to leave here; but I see that it is nothing less than divine Providence that has kept me in Rome, so I shall

remain a little longer. Although in my thoughts I am always at Monte Calvario, enjoying your company, still I thank God for this delay, as for everything else. The ways of the Lord are sublime, and he works his designs from afar. Continue to pray for me. I always say Mass for you and for myself, sinner that I am, asking God to save us and make us faithful in doing his will, which is our sanctification. All that I have published here has had one aim only — as have all my thoughts and wishes: the salvation of our souls. Goodbye. The peace of the Lord be with you. May he fill you with his light and may this light to guide our footsteps be his law. *I have said, you are my portion, O Lord; I have promised to keep your word. As long as I heed all your commandments I shall not be put to shame. So be it Amen. Amen.*

Goodbye,

A.R.

## 68. To the deacon Giacomo Molinari at Domodossola

Rome, 25 December 1829

My dear brother in the Lord,

I was greatly consoled to hear that you have been called by your superiors in Novara to receive the diaconate... So we shall see you back at Calvario, strengthened by the Holy Spirit, with new vigour against the enemy and fresh zeal for the beauty of the house of God and for the salvation of souls. I earnestly wish you all the gifts of Stephen, of Lawrence. As you requested, I have offered, and continue to offer my poor prayers to the Lord that you may be able to support and strengthen the Church of God (as the Israelites of old carried the tabernacle), by holiness of life, by preaching of the word of God, and by showing a perfect example to others —these being the things which the Bishop enjoined upon you before he imposed his hands. My dear brother, we have only to realize the dignity we have received [through ordination I to be resolved to humble ourselves and feel confusion before God who has so exalted us — and to fear also. I am sure that you drew much profit from the retreat you made, so as to understand more profoundly the new state and the new dignity and duties which you were about to take on; and [resolved] through God's mercy to make yourself more worthy, purifying your conscience and giving yourself more totally to him.

I am sure, too, that when you return to Domodossola you will feel a new zeal for the state of the church there — its cleanliness and its furnishing — so that everything (as far as our poverty allows) may be fine and fitting, and that the worship of God may be carried out with fidelity, devotion and regularity. No doubt you will also take up again with renewed devotion the instructions you give to the children, as a duty forming part of your office, since a deacon (besides ministering at the altar and baptizing) is commissioned also to preach, when the bishop calls upon him to do so. So give freely of the word and the Spirit of God to the tender hearts of these little ones, of whom is the kingdom of heaven.

Draw ever closer to our dear Don Giovanni by the humility and docility which are so dear to God and can never be too great; and be dependent on him in all things, even the smallest.

In your charity you express the wish to have me join you there. My dear brother, believe me, I too have the same wish. But I have to follow the will of God, and I must stay here for a while yet. I cannot hope to be with you before the end of February or the beginning of March. Then, if the Lord allows, I shall be off to Calvario, When I come I will bring you many spiritual gifts; meanwhile all of you must pray for me — pray for my soul, which it is my one desire to save. *The time is short...*

Goodbye. I embrace you lovingly in Jesus and Mary — may they always be in our hearts.

Yours affectionately,

A.R.

## 69. To Don Gregorio Berardi in Rome

Rome, 4 January 1830

My dear Don Gregorio,

I am returning the manuscript of your book, *Moral Maxims*, written in four languages for children, which you kindly let me have to read. I can hardly venture an opinion on a book which has already been seen and praised by eminent men. But I will add just a word to what has been said by them — and it is this: you have, through your conception of a work of this kind, seized on the one way by which hopes for humanity can be discerned — hopes which look to the generations to come; and this way is none other than by restoring to morality its supreme importance, putting it in its proper place, which is before all other teachings (which only morality can make beneficial). It has been pulled down from that position by human arrogance, much as rulers have been dragged down from their thrones. Indeed attempts have been made to pull God down from heaven, as if such a thing were possible. What is needed is to nourish man from earliest childhood — from his mother's milk — with the ideas of moral duty ... since it is only through these that society can exist and all the benefits that go with it. Knowledge can only come from society, just as the existence of society depends on and follows from morality.

So to confine education to mere knowledge, while banishing morality from it, is to destroy society. And what is left of knowledge when society is no more? God grant that all educators and rulers of peoples may understand in future these salutary truths! I am forever preaching them, by my words and by my writing, and when I come across one of the few who join with me in this campaign, I already greatly love him, even when I do not know him, and I embrace him with a feeling of brotherhood and gratitude. So how much affection I must feel for you, when you show yourself wholly in agreement [with me] in this worthy endeavour to reform the moral education of young people! You can imagine how much — you who cannot fail to know how dear to me and how greatly esteemed you were even before this

Yours affectionately,

A.R.

## 70. To Don G.B. Loewenbruck at Domodossola

Rome, 9 January 1830

My dear friend and brother in Jesus Christ,

I am impatient to hear news from you about our good deacon, Molinari, who (I gather) is ill. This alone will recommend him to your charity, and for my part I do the same, with all my heart. If you are unable to write yourself, get someone else to send me word; for since I know that his illness is quite serious, I am anxious about him. I will pray to the Lord for him and obtain the prayers of others.

I am glad that the good Canon has in you someone to console him over the death of his brother. How good God is, and how wisely and gently he manages things. Who could have foreseen that you were to be sent to him from so far away?

In the meanwhile, you must rejoice in the Lord because everything you do is inspired by his love, and has great value in his eyes. This is especially the case because the more hidden your good deeds are, the more secure they are. Let us act so that they are hidden even from ourselves.

I would urge you not to neglect in any way the care of Molinari, whatever other matters claim your attention; for it is only right that we should joyfully carry out the calls of charity that God puts before us.

Now I will tell you about a young Doctor of Law who came to see me here; he already knows English and speaks it perfectly, and he wants to give himself to the service of God. Having read a few little things of mine and so heard about our principles of action, he wants to join us. Notice that I neither invited him nor gave him the least encouragement to do this. He has begun a theology course with the Jesuits, and he gives signs of great ability. It seems to me that I should have been refusing the gift of the Lord if I had turned him away. May God act in this matter. I have no intention of directing the young man to come to me in the near future: rather, I shall leave him to finish his course. It is better for him to be here in Rome; and better too for our little affair (if this is what God wills) that he should be here; since the principle we have adopted, of depending always on Providence ... seeking only the sanctification of our own souls, pleases him greatly. We cannot tell what God wants of this young man; but in any event it is always of value to share friendship in the Lord with good men; and to all appearances this young man I am telling you about is one such.

Goodbye. I embrace in the Lord yourself, Molinari and the good Canon. (Do give him my condolences). May the grace of Jesus Christ be with us. Amen.

Yours affectionately,

A.R.





## 71. To Don G.B. Loewenbruck at Domodossola

Rome, 16 February 1830

My dear brother in Jesus Christ, the source of salvation and grace,

First of all, I do not know if you have received my last two letters ... In the first I told you that the Lord is showing that he wants to add one more member to our little society of Calvario; and since I am afraid my letter may have been lost, I will repeat what I told you about this person and add further news.

While I was ill with smallpox, I had a visit from a young man who was previously quite unknown to me, and was then introduced to me by a priest I happened to meet in Rome. After his first visit this young man made many others; and upon hearing that I had published a thing or two he asked me for some of my writings — so I gave him one or two small works. He told me that in one of these my way of thinking pleased him so much that from then on he was warmly disposed towards me. Later, after much discussion between us, he enquired what I was doing, whether I was going to stay in Rome, where I had come from, and why; to all these questions I replied frankly. Shortly after that, when he knew of our situation in Domodossola, he said: 'Who knows? The Lord may wish me to go there. Perhaps he means me to join you?' — and so on. To this I either made no rejoinder, or at most showed no enthusiasm.

It is worth noticing that this young man had completed a course of legal studies; and having taken doctorates in both canon and civil law, he had begun a career in the courts, in which his father was a distinguished lawyer. But he found legal practice little to his liking, and so thought of earning his living, and at the same time benefiting his family, by giving language lessons to the English people who in winter are so numerous here, and who pay generously. The young man is called Luigi Gentili, and he speaks the language so well that he might have been born in England. So by this employment he was earning a good deal of money — so much so that he bought himself a vineyard and set out on the road to fortune. But it seems that the Lord had other designs for him, and spoke to his heart of better fortunes that are not of this world. This caused him to become weary of giving English lessons and of going about in the social world — which is not without its dangers. So he soon turned his mind to wondering whether to leave the world and give himself to God, though he still did not know where God wanted him to be. Thinking about this, it seemed to him that the answer was within the Society of Jesus, which he had always thought very highly of. But what would you? As soon as he had made this decision and asked to be admitted to the Jesuits, he was taken ill with fever. This lasted for a year, so that he could not carry out the plan he was so set on. The doctors in the end managed to discourage him from entering the Society either then or in the near future. In the end he regained his health, but at the same time he no longer had thoughts of becoming a Jesuit, though he still wanted to give himself to God — now more than ever. This was his situation when chance, or rather I mean the divine Providence which rules over and disposes all the most unforeseen circumstances, led him to me. I was ill at the time, but when I was well again he

still often visited me, asking me many questions, learning about our way of life, and in the end showing an inclination to share it. I never asked him to join his life to mine, but limited myself to saying two things to him as the occasion arose: first, that a life dedicated to seeking the perfection of the evangelical counsels was something of infinite worth; and second, that if he was in earnest about giving himself to this life, the first step must be to leave his home (*egredere de domo tua*) and give his life over to God. He often told me that, as regards the first, he was determined to follow the evangelical counsels; and as for the second, he did not know what to do, since if he stopped giving the English lessons, he had nothing to live on; and moreover his family looked to him for support, since they were very numerous.

All I said in answer was that he must pray to the Lord and trust in his Providence. During all this time I had said nothing about our Institute, but spoke only of the perfect life in general. But one evening Gentili threw himself at my feet, saying that he performed this act of humility with great repugnance, but he was determined to conquer these feelings of his because it seemed to him that he was following an inspiration from the Lord. He then begged me for some financial help, so that he could abandon the English lessons, leave his home, and attend entirely to God and to the theological studies which he had already begun in the Roman College. I replied more or less on these lines -saying that his aim was certainly a holy one; that I would have liked to help over it but that he knew of my commitment to Monte Calvario and that I had dedicated the limited Funds I had available to the Lord in the little society we had formed there. But I added that if the leanings he had spoken to me about previously (towards joining our society) were to become active resolutions, then I would be able to do as he asked -but not otherwise. He then took himself off to think this over, and in the end, after listening to his spiritual advisers, he told me that he was determined to join our little society. I then thanked God for all this, and began to hope that perhaps this young man was one whom the Lord was sending me.

Afterwards, he made arrangements for leaving home -and it all went smoothly - and the Lord found him a suitable place in the Irish College, where he now is as a paying boarder. The members of the Irish College attend the Roman College, and he along with them. (The head of the College is Cardinal Cappellari, and he quickly secured a place in it for Gentili as a kindness to me -he is very well disposed towards us.) Now it is a matter of arranging for him to take orders, and my inclination is to get him ordained deacon; but I will pray over this to the Lord. So you see, I have done nothing myself it is God who has acted -may he ever be blessed. Now we must wait and see what the rest of his design is; and whatever the outcome (of this as of all other things), we shall, with the help of his grace, always be content.

I have just received your latest letter, but the post is about to leave. I will reply another time. Goodbye.

A.R.

## 72. To Count Giacomo Mellerio in Rome

Domodossola, 14 May 1830

My dear friend,

I safely arrived here [at Monte Calvario] yesterday evening, and I cannot express the spiritual consolation I felt at seeing this place again and rejoining the dear people who have been living here during my absence. The last stage of my journey, from Vogogna, was very trying, because I was impatient to see once again the mountains around Calvario – to which my heart had already gone ahead so as to embrace again Don Giovanni, Molinari, Isaia and Flecchia. And their pleasure in seeing me again you can guess at, given their affection for me. Canon Capis was the first to see me and show his joy – a joy I also felt at seeing him.

I found everything at Calvario in excellent shape, far exceeding my hopes and expectations. Many people come here: every day a great number of confessions are heard – so much so that even now I have not yet been able to have a quiet moment with Don Giovanni, who is ever in the confessional. Mgr Scavini, whom I saw at Novara, made it clear that he admires and is very happy about the indefatigable zeal of Don Giovanni. I was unable to see the Cardinal while I was at Novara because he was away on visitation. But I have written to him to let him know that I am back, and to say that I will visit him at Novara when he is free.

What gives me the greatest consolation is the news I have been given of the conversions that have taken place here, and the considerable change for the better in the conduct of the people. In spite of all this – or rather because of these things – it would not surprise me if the devil were enraged against us. When I made a retreat at S. Andrea under Fr Rossini I remember well what he said to me. When he asked me if things were going smoothly at Calvario and I told him they were, he replied: 'As long as you are doing little good you will have peace and quiet; but be quite sure that if you begin to do great good, the devil will mount fierce attacks against you.' I am sure that this is so, and I am ready for it – not because I believe I am doing great good (rather, I know that I do much harm), but because God could make use of the work of my companions here (as of anyone else) to do good. And if this happened, the one who was a murderer from the beginning would set himself against us. Still, with God's help, I will glory in this, provided that the persecutions we meet with are entirely unjust and undeserved. I am led to say these things simply because of the smiling aspect and apparent prospering of things here. If you get the opportunity, tell Gentili about the situation. The affection for me which the Lord (the source of all love) inspires in him I fully return, perhaps in even greater degree – if indeed there is any measuring of the love of those who love one another in God, in whom all loves meet and mingle. Share this letter, as also my affection, with our dear Giulio. Goodbye for now. In haste – I embrace you warmly in Jesus Christ.

Your Rosmini

### 73. To Signor Luigi Gentili In Rome

Calvario, 19 May 1830

My dear friend and brother in Jesus Christ

I arrived here on 13 May, to my great joy. You will have heard of the events of my journey from Count Mellerio, to whom I wrote about them, and so I will say no more on that subject<sup>19</sup> I have found things here even better than I expected~ everything is well organized, thanks to our dear Don Giovanni [Loewenbruck]; there is perfect unity, much fervour and humility, both in our good deacon [Molinari] and in the brethren. God is clearly present in all this. Divine Providence is blessing the works done in the locality, so that great spiritual fruit is to be seen in the valleys round about. God has many hidden treasures there, and the people show a disposition to advance in perfection. Here there is much going on, there are great expectations, and many demands are made on us. But we are short of workers. Oh, if only you were here too! Certainly you would be able to do much good, God willing, by working humbly and secretly. Humility is something precious to me, and to be hidden away is most pleasing. The one thing I fear is that we may not be able to continue like this for long. But we must leave all to God and our holy Mother, Mary.

On Tuesday I am due to visit the Cardinal of Novara, and I am taking with me our deacon, so that he may be ordained priest by the Cardinal next Pentecost. He is approaching the priesthood with some trepidation and out of obedience, understanding how great is the office, and made humble by the thought of such a dignity. It was not enough for him that the superiors in Novara placed this obligation on him: even so, he was anxious to speak to me and to see if he could be excused (if I thought fit), at least for a time, from taking this step. But it seemed to me, taking into account the decision of his superiors and his own excellent dispositions, together with the fact that when I examined his knowledge of doctrine I found him very well instructed, that the will of God was plain. So I told him to obey without putting forward any objections: *cani sunt sensus hominis* [wisdom can come before grey hairs]. I will write to you at greater length another time giving more details, but this is enough for now.

Write telling me something about your studies, your disposition to serve the Lord, and your inner feelings. Also give me news of the friends I have left in Rome — and of these, please greet for me Barola, Terasconi and Giuliari in particular. And with regard to Barola, to whom I shall be writing very soon: on my departure from Rome I left with him a little present for you, feeling sure that you would accept it in the spirit in which it was given: it was a piece of advice over the way in which we ought to put forward in conversation matters

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<sup>19</sup> The main accident which Rosmini met with in his journey was the overturning of his carriage one night; it finished up in a ditch, but he was not hurt.

of sound instruction: in other words, how best to convey them (especially when dealing with people of sound repute, and speaking of things which are well known, not at all out of the way), in such a fashion as not to seem as if we were teaching something new, but merely calling to mind, for the sake of general edification, familiar things. By so acting, humility is better observed, and respect is shown to our hearers, since we show that we are sure they already know these things, and perhaps know them better than we ourselves do. I felt some scruple over not saying this to you earlier, along with some hesitation in doing so. I tried to do so on several occasions, but then held my tongue. This difficulty I felt though it was a defect on my part, (because among close friends and brothers, such as we are in the Lord, there should be greater freedom and openness) arises, I must confess, partly from the fear that, wishing to give advice to others, I may meet with the retort (whether spoken or not): *Physician, heal thyself*. And I am aware that this reproach is apt enough in my case. However, you will know how to draw profit from my opinion, or at least from my good intentions, and will take care to avoid (when you are in conversation) any phrases which might suggest to others that we regard ourselves as having a superior knowledge of matters to do with piety. Also you might show greater humility and modesty in expressing what you want to say. This is something we can always improve over.

When you write, give me news of when you will receive the diaconate. I suppose this will be next Pentecost; at which time all our small household here will pray for you and for our deacon, that the Holy Spirit may descend on you and make you constant in perseverance and in perfecting your holy vocation.

The teachings I am working to spread are close to my heart, for as you know, I believe this to be the will of God for me. So let me know how the *Nuovo Saggio* [New Essay on the Origin of Ideas] has been received and what view of it is taken by learned men.

Give my greetings to my Jesuit friends, especially to Padre Piancini<sup>20</sup> and Padre Rossini. Continue to love me. All here send you their warmest greetings. Don Giovanni, busy as ever, will be replying to your letter as soon as he can. Again, goodbye *in osculo sancta*.

Yours affectionately,

R.

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<sup>20</sup> Padre Giambattista Piancini was one of the two Roman censors who approved the printing of the *Nuovo Saggio*.

## 74. To Signor Luigi Gentili in Rome

Calvario, 4 June 1830

My dear friend and brother in Christ,

Your letter made me very happy, because it seems to me that the Lord has given you a holy fervour; and after reading what you say I could do no less than kneel before the Blessed Sacrament and thank God, praying (unworthy as I am) for you and for myself. As for the matter of your Irish companion [Andrew Quinn], it seems to be the working of that infinitely good Providence in which according to the spirit of our Institute we live with complete abandonment. Do greet him warmly from me: the golden rule of St Ignatius will help him to discern better his vocation. As for giving him the Constitutions to read: if you judge that he is mature enough and capable of understanding them with sound discernment, by all means let him have them. But tell him to keep them to himself, and enjoin on him the same things that I said to you. You should also tell him not to read them hastily or all at one time, but slowly and in order, dwelling on every detail, but especially noting their spirit which is embodied in the ascetical principles — for the spirit is everything. With regard to the development which may come about in the Institute in the future (and which is described in the later parts of the Constitutions), I consider that the imagination could be stimulated unduly by the thought of such an enlargement, to the detriment of the spirit of humility, of living a hidden life, entirely abandoned to God; and could instead breed in us a spirit of enterprise and ambition which could only be thoroughly alien to us — something proper only to the world, the effect of self-love, contrary to the simplicity of the gospel and to the grace of Jesus Christ. For this reason we need to have a firm foundation of humility and contempt of ourselves such as is enjoined in the first half of the Constitutions. We need to bear in mind always that our model is, after Christ himself, the Blessed Virgin, who lived the most hidden of lives, in poverty and tranquillity. Yet God glorified her above all others; and while she left herself wholly in the care of God, he, by his grace, brought about greater marvels in her than in any other creature. With good reason she is considered by the Church as the archetype of wisdom, since there is no greater wisdom than to live at peace in God and to exult in him with complete faith in his mercy, giving praise and thanks to him for all the workings of his Providence — that is, for everything without exception. So I hope that our Irish friend will cultivate a tender devotion to Mary our Mother, to whom our little Institute is most especially dedicated. We wish to be all hers, claiming this right in view of the bequest left to us by Jesus Christ which made us her children. My dear Gentili, we must fear nothing while we have our Mother and Captain at our head, leading us. Over such sentiments I know that we are perfectly at one; and it is a great delight to find ourselves in such accord.

Don Giovanni salutes you warmly and embraces you in the Lord. He works untiringly. Today I have not seen him since five o'clock the time of our meditation. He said Mass even earlier, and went off to visit some dying persons to whom he was summoned; he did not return even for the midday meal, and now it is nearly evening. And when he does return he will find further calls, to other sick beds. Meanwhile today he was unable to hear the confessions of those who awaited him. One poor woman the other day, after journeying for ten hours to make her confession to him, was unable to enter the confessional because of the crowd of other penitents, and she waited, fasting, until evening came, in the hopes of making her confession and receiving Holy Communion — not realizing that the time of Communion had passed. Blessed be God, who keeps such treasures hidden in the world.

Molinari is at Novara for his ordination; next Monday we shall have him back as a priest, and our joy will be no less than his. Isaia was pleased to get your greetings, and kisses your hand. Don Andrea [Fenner] and Toni [Antonio Bisoffi], who are here with us as guests, also greet you again. We are all praying for you and Molinari in community each evening, and I make a special remembrance at Mass.

You are quite right to reprove me: I confessed my fault in my previous letter — my fault of pusillanimity. And the origin of this, as I said, is my sense of unworthiness, to which I did not want to add the temerity of wishing to remove the mote from someone else's eye while I had a beam in my own. I cannot express to you how great is the unworthiness I see in myself; I cannot even fully take it in; and the truth of this is borne out by the joy which I feel when I think of this: since joy only comes of the truth, and God does not allow it to result from error.

Let us love one another in the Lord, in whom we are united. Let all our thoughts be about him, and let us detach ourselves entirely from this wretched world — and above all from ourselves. Goodbye.

Yours,

R.

## 75. To Signor Luigi Gentili in Rome

Calvario, 22 June 1830

My dear brother in Jesus Christ,

The love which I have for you (and I beg you to treat me henceforth in the same frank manner), and the desire you express in your letter, that I should be generous (as you put it) towards you even while we are at a distance by making you not small presents but big ones, and as often as possible, makes me show you in practice that I will not fail to satisfy your holy request; and so I will make such remarks about your letter as seem to me useful, and which I trust will be well received by you, with the same fraternal love in which they are offered. So I feel prompted to put you on your guard against the devil, who will certainly do his best to impede all your good resolutions. I fear I see in you a certain lack of generosity, and instead some pusillanimity. There is nothing so contrary to the service of God as this. Notice well, my dear friend, that I say 'I fear'; and by this I mean that it may not be so; but I want you to make a diligent examination of conscience to see if ever the devil manages to infect you with weakness and faintheartedness, so that (should this be the case) you can immediately banish these things, and instead show the generosity of our divine Master, Jesus Christ the conqueror of the devil. When Satan sees that we are courageous he loses heart, and after a few more attacks he leaves us alone. But if he sees that things are otherwise, that we are cowardly and feeble, this is what he wants: he leaves us no peace, and if we do not at once banish our fear, then he has won the victory. We must pray earnestly with the psalmist *Save me, Lord, from my feebleness of spirit and rescue me from the stain*. The storm follows inevitably from pusillanimity; whereas generosity leads to serenity. Only faith in God and in his Providence can be the source of generosity, while mean-spirited souls experience distrust and are deaf to the divine word. But I want you to know that I am not saying these things so that you will write and say that you will join us as soon as possible, next spring or next autumn; no, simply in consequence of some of the things you say in your letter.

You show in it great apprehension over the gossip of the world. My dear friend, if we are afraid of what the world says, we shall never do anything that makes for the glory of God. There is nothing I care less about than such chattering. But notice that I am not saying that if one course of action rather than another excites less gossip we should not prefer it. What I am saying is that we should never neglect even the slightest opportunity of doing good on account of what the world might say. If we took any notice of such things we should soon be inhibited from doing any good; since the world will always go in for gossip, and even persecution. The *disciple is not above his Master*. We shall be wretched creatures if we take notice of the world's tittle-tattle, or if we give credence



to its false (though often subtle) reasonings. We shall lose our way, and no longer take the road shown to us by Christ; we shall be deceived; flesh and blood will have seduced us. You say that if people knew of your departure from Rome, 'they would regard this as a worse madness than the first, and would take any steps to prevent it, since they would find it incredible that someone who for health reasons had not been able to enter a religious house on the Quirinal could ever truly be called by God to a place in the foothills of the Alps, if he knew what he was doing.' Really! Is what the world calls madness truly so? If so, then the cross of Christ is madness too; and so is the gospel; and so is the action of the apostles, who exposed themselves to all sorts of dangers and sufferings among barbarian nations; so is the witness of faith given by the holy martyrs ... all madness. But in reality how desirable is this kind of 'madness'; would that I had this same madness, and that it were incurable and went to extremes! This divine madness is something I long for, and with tears daily plead to God for. I am certain that you will not really regard this as madness, but rather see it as true wisdom. But if what the world takes to be madness is really wisdom, why not embrace this wisdom? Why should we let ourselves be scared by the fact that the world calls the wisdom of the gospel a sort of madness? Why should we be guided in our own conduct by the verdict of a senseless world? And I call this judgement senseless even when it comes from our family, our friends, even priests — who can all represent the world as far as we are concerned. When we come to the judgement-seat of Jesus Christ, do we want to say to him: 'I did not listen to and promptly obey your voice, because the world told me that it would be madness to do so'? He would reply: 'Go, then, and take your reward from the world, your master ... that world which I have overcome and which is no more.'

So the world, you think, would compare the Quirinal with the foothills of the Alps. That is its way. But Jesus, on the contrary said: *True worshippers adore the Father in spirit and in truth*. And as for health: if the world judged as you say, it would be doing so in its usual mistaken fashion, making no distinction between the time when you were ill and the present, when you are well again. And as for coming here, 'not knowing what you are doing': certainly the world has no idea of what is done in holy retirement. But those who are sent away from the crazy world by the impulse of the Holy Spirit *do* know. I am quite sure that when Jesus Christ went into the desert, the world had no understanding of what he went there to do. But Christ did not expect the world to understand. Indeed, how can the world ever understand such things? But *we* ought to understand them. And If we fail to do so, that is because we too are of the world. 'Not knowing what you are about'? Is it possible that such a verdict can trouble you? I will tell the world very plainly what I have come here to do: to fulfil my vocation; to answer the call of God; to get well away from so foolish a world; to purify my conscience; to save my soul. That is what is to be done here. And this cannot be a small matter — not for you, not for me. Heaven help anyone who does not know what he has to do in the place where he is called by

the Lord. How remote from the spirit of our Institute are the world's reasonings. For goodness' sake examine yourself, look into yourself, so that you may not be in the least contaminated by the slightest shadow of worldliness. Unfortunately the breath of the world does contaminate us: it is plague-ridden, and we breathe it in without realizing it.

You say, 'the world would prevent this at all costs'. It could not do so if you were resolute; the world can only put obstacles in your way if it weakens and overcomes your will; all the more so since your government does not oppose vocations. The saints were never held back by the world, because they trod it beneath their feet, and for the sake of Jesus Christ 'hated' father, mother, brothers and sisters, husbands, wives, children. When it was necessary, they trod them beneath their feet, as did St Jane de Chantal: feeling the need to obey Christ, she did not fear the world: she knew it was powerless; and she knew that only God has power to do or to prevent everything according to his will.

So I beg you to consider well all these things, to look carefully into all the secret movements of your soul, so that you are not in fact taking one road while you believe you are taking another. What is quite certain is that the greatest obstacles we meet with in the way of perfection are those which the saints greatly feared: human opinions, human respect, love of family, anxiety for the interests either of self or of family — it amounts to the same thing. If we overcome these snares of the devil, we can with the help of divine grace fly freely. But not before: the slightest thread can tie us to the ground. Christ's words are plain: *No one can be my disciple if he does not leave and have a holy hatred of his kin and if he does not renounce all things*. Those who think they can find a middle path, a compromise, are deceived by the devil. This is not what Christ taught. He has no need of us; he only invites us out of his mercy: a man can do himself harm by delaying for a single day to correspond with divine grace.

But I repeat that I am not saying these things to oblige you to come this autumn; only because I am afraid that the devil may subject you to strong temptations, as is his way; and I believe that the fraternal love which I have for you, and which I owe you, requires me to come to your help (as you yourself wish), telling you of my fears and begging you (if my fears have any foundation) to resist the enemy resolutely. If you listen to the world, and want to enjoy the human consolations that derive in the world from family and friends, you will go on reinforcing the bonds which tie you to the world: bonds that are unfortunately as spiritually fatal as they are alluring. I did not let such attractions stop me from coming here; I do not think I was held back by such considerations for a single day. If I thought so, I should feel unending remorse. So it is not against the spirit of God for you to come here, giving one reason rather than another; in any case, this can simply be a matter of using prudence. But it is contrary to the spirit of God to delay coming here, whether through

fear of what people might say or through family ties, or attachment to your friends or to your home, I have a mother whom I greatly love, and who sends me letters and advice, and orders me not to leave home. I should like you to see what I have replied to her. I have kept copies of some of my letters; and I am sure they would seem to 'the world' too hard — because it does not understand the love of Christ. I told her plainly that she must cease to give me orders or send me requests, because she has no right to do so over such matters; that if I acceded to her wishes I should be doing her will, not the will of my Father, who is my God. Therefore she should not write to me any more in this fashion. And she has not done so. We have to say *Get thee behind me, Satan* to our family, as Christ did to St Peter. You have made me behave foolishly in talking about myself; but I did so to vindicate myself, since it appears that you excused yourself on the score that I told you that I am living here secretly and that I make sure that no one knows what I am about. Certainly there is no need for people to know what we are doing; but it is necessary that we *do* what we are doing.

That is what I feel bound in conscience to say to you. For pity's sake examine yourself well over the rule of life of Jesus Christ and of the saints. When Christ lingered among the doctors, speaking with them when he was only twelve years old, he said nothing about this to his mother. Here is an important lesson for us. He spoke plainly~ all the saints spoke plainly. He is a 'jealous God'; and in the gospel we never see him tolerating a refusal. So walk straight ahead before him; examine yourself over sincerity of conduct so that neither you yourself nor others are deceived. Sincerity can never co-exist with a love of the things of this world. In short, see that you look carefully at such things as you decide to make the subject of your examination of conscience, and do so punctiliously, in the light of eternity, solely in the presence of God, silencing the voice of the world and of your passions. This will help you, either to put things right, if you find that, through the work of the devil you have acted amiss in this respect, or by increasing your generosity in the service of Jesus Christ, along with all the other basic virtues that go together and are inseparable, such as integrity and sincerity. In this way you will provide yourself with a solid foundation; and the only such foundation is the starkness of the cross. I hope you will console me by carrying out the things I am recommending to you — things which I consider to be of the greatest importance for the salvation of your soul, and perhaps for that of many others. You asked me for great presents': I hope that this is really one such. Truly, the subject I have been speaking about is of a grave nature; and the love which urges me to bring these thoughts before you is no less great. My dear Gentili, *we do not know whence the Spirit comes or whither he goes* (Jn 3,8). What we need is not warriors who kneel down to drink, but those who stand upright and drink from their hands. [Cf. Judg. 7, 5-61. I think our Lady gave us this place so that we might learn how to separate the one sort from the other.

I embrace you warmly in Christ. Tell Terasconi that I return his greetings to me, with interest All here send you their best wishes. I will say more about other matters another time.

Yours affectionately,

R.

PS We have here someone who was sent to us by his superiors to make a retreat, and I gave it, using the method of St Ignatius (it was the first time I had done this). I found it most effective. Tell P. Rossini this — and give him my warm thanks for his charity in remembering me before the Lord, especially in his daily Mass.

## 76. To Signor Luigi Gentili In Rome

Calvario, 5 July 1830

My dear friend and brother in Jesus Christ,

I am replying promptly to your letter of 24 June, which arrived only today. I sympathize with the temptations you tell me about, and over which you ask for our prayers here. We do always pray in community for you and for our other absent brethren. I trust that, through the goodness of God, my last letter to you, which I wrote from my heart and as my conscience dictated, has served to encourage you not to pay any heed to the things of this world, but to look only to God, in whose presence we must act always with our eyes solely on eternity. But I thank the same God, who is active in all things and who strengthens the weak, because in your letter you speak in manly terms, so confirming my hope that you have a lively confidence in him, It is only with his help that we can acquire true firmness, obtain the mastery over ourselves (subject as we are to vacillation, because we are subject to sin), and tame our imagination, confine it. It is unfortunately always ready to cause us to offend, and I would say it is pretty well incorrigible. That is why we often have to hold it captive, imprison it, — as the mad are confined. St Francis de Sales used to say: 'self-love is a great deceiver'. I would say the same of the imagination, which is closely connected with self-love. So although it seems that, as you say, you have well understood the spirit of our Institute, keep yourself in the greatest possible simplicity and tranquillity. Pray to the Lord: humble yourself, and look for nothing further. I greatly rejoice to know that God lets you taste the ineffable delight which comes of a hidden life and remaining unknown to others. This is the Golden Key of heaven. My heart is filled with gladness when I see that our dear brethren, too, grow in understanding of this wisdom. Humility and poverty of spirit in the grace of Jesus Christ — these are the only riches we are ambitious for. May the Lord make us all wealthy in this way.

Give my warm greetings to the young Irishman [Andrew Quinn]. It seems to me to augur a good beginning when I see that he asks advice over proceeding to the subdiaconate. This shows that he is intimately persuaded of the greatness of this order; and this is entirely in accord with the spirit of the Institute.

Today I also received another letter, from a priest in Milan, who says that he wishes to give himself entirely to God. His letter, written with the consent of his confessor, shows that he wants to enter our company and to be directed in all things by complete obedience. But I am inclined to reply to him saying that for the present he should say no more about this, but perfect himself in his present position, and that God will dispose things for the future. He must act in all things maturely with and through God. So add your prayers so that none of us may do anything foolish or put obstacles in the way of divine grace, which alone produces good.

Tomorrow I am expecting Cardinal Morozzo, who is coming to spend the day with us. So at the moment we are somewhat distracted by the preparations which need to be made in the house. I am the only one — being the least active of all! — who is not caught up in the bustle of activity; so here I am, in my little room talking to you. But now I must leave you. I embrace you in the Lord, in whom 'we are one'. I will have more to say another time. All the brethren greet you, and in their love long to have you with us. Greet my friends by name, and commend to our holy Mother your brother in the Lord —

R.

## 77. To Don Giovanni Boselli in Milan

Calvario, 9 July 1830

My dear Father,

I believe that the most necessary sort of preparation you need to make if the Lord is calling you to join us is, first, to become accustomed to solitude and silence; and second, to cultivate the habit of study. Until you have acquired these two habits, you will not be able to share our way of life, because these are the hinges, so to speak, of our existence. We never go out without necessity and each of us studies for as much time as he has available after prayer and the various duties of charity. It is a matter of overcoming oneself where one feels most disinclination. If you can do all this, and (with God's help) conquer yourself, it may be that you will make yourself fit to join us. But it will call for perseverance, courage and humility. So test yourself, and then write to me.

But, I repeat, I believe recollection to be essential for you (and this means avoiding the things that dissipate one's spirit — such as conversations and friendships), together with knowing how to be unrelenting in employing all your time, and stability in pursuing whatever studies you undertake.

Pray also for us. My beloved companions, Loewenbruck and Molinari, send you warm greetings.

I shall not write directly to dear Bonetti, so as not to multiply letters without need. Tell him that his letter was most welcome, and that he must pray and never tire of praying, trying always to serve the Lord (who will give him ever more light and consolation). We are all intent on doing his adorable will, for there is no other real good on earth. May our daily bread consist in meditating on the wounds of Jesus crucified and on the sorrows of our Mother Mary. Let us have love for one another in the Lord, for if we have this we have everything.

Yours affectionately.

A.R.

## 78. To Signor Luigi Gentili in Rome

Monte Calvario, 2 August 1830

My brother in our Lord Jesus Christ,

Your letter was consoling. I thank the Lord for inspiring in you a detachment from the world, from your family and from self-interest and even more for the willingness you show over coming here this autumn, which is a factual proof of the good intentions which you express. Cherish these sentiments as a precious gift which God has given you, and let us both pray that we may never through our own fault lose such a treasure. Whoever possesses it is blessed: *Blessed is he to whom this was revealed not by flesh and blood but by my Father who is in heaven.* And as Isaiah says, those only can dwell on the heights *who have shut their ears lest they hear of bloodshed.* And God, who has put these sentiments in our hearts, will give us the strength to realize them in practice. There is a great gap between talking and doing; and the devil does not sleep, but is active within this gap. But Christ too does not sleep: he will be active on our behalf, provided that we keep watch with him. And even our vigilance will be his gift. So let us humble ourselves, make ourselves small, and pray without ceasing.

As for your coming in the autumn, I do not want to take advantage of your willingness by putting any pressure on you to do so. Rather, I am quite content for you to stay in Rome until the spring. It is enough for me to have seen your firm purpose, with no sign of that all-too-human inconstancy of will which makes us ask ourselves, 'What can God ever make of us?' — and fear the answer is 'nothing.' Still I confess I have some fears for you, since you may face the deceits of the world during this period when you have not yet entirely escaped *de laqueo venantium* [from the snare of the fowlers 1~ For I have read about (and unfortunately experienced within myself) how great is the subtlety, the craftiness, of the enemy of mankind when it is a matter of attacking and upsetting the things for which he has an unmeasured hatred. Not that you must suppose this to mean that I have lost confidence in you — not at all, my friend. I simply have doubts about human nature, about myself, about this sinful flesh of ours, our fickle heart, our ignorance of mind, that spirit of presumption that unfortunately we have inherited from our first parents. And this goes for all my poor, wretched brothers and sisters, the rest of mankind. This, then, is why I am apprehensive (I say this plainly) during all this time when you are surrounded by so many relatives, friends and various allurements. These dangers may well be greatest after you have come to celebrate Mass (if God grants you that grace in the autumn), because then, along with the very devotion you will feel, the devil may deceive you and wage an even greater offensive against you. But my fears are not greater than my trust in Jesus Christ. In him, through the divine mercy, I find such tranquillity that for a long time now, nothing has occurred that had the power to disturb me. *Have faith: I*



*have overcome the world.* That saying of our Lord is the basis of our humble confidence.

But I will tell you why our dear brethren would be so glad to have you with us this autumn. Apart from their general desire to see you removed from the world and at the foot of the cross together with us, there is another consideration: I came here on Ash Wednesday in 1828 with the purpose of beginning my noviciate; then this was interrupted by my journey to Rome. But now the noviciate must be recommenced — and we are all anxious to do this. Next Ash Wednesday our fourth Lent will begin; so we have made up our minds to start on that holy day a noviciate that will be a more solemn one, more in conformity with the Constitutions. Once Lent is over, and after a suitable period, we shall commit ourselves to taking our vows and electing a superior, so that he may be entrusted with the charge of carefully directing our little community. So we feel a keen desire to have you present with us for all this. But if this is not God's will, we shall resign ourselves accordingly. I know you will unite yourself with us as best you can, making the Spiritual Exercises while you remain in Rome; and so you will give us your help, even from afar.

But I want to tell you something about our situation. We form 'one heart and one soul'; the whole day is so wisely organized that it passes in a flash. Our devotions, our studies, our works of charity (and we have more requests for these than we can cope with), are the pleasing labours that our time is divided among. We read at table: to start with we read the *Life of Christ* by Cesari; then we had the life of St Alphonsus Liguori; and now we are getting towards the end of the life of St Francis de Sales — full as it is of holy teachings. I must tell you too that God in his mercy seems to wish to add another house to this little one of ours. [See Letter No.87.] The Cardinal of the diocese, who spent two whole days with us (adapting himself to our rather exiguous conditions) asked us to take on the giving of retreats to the local clergy. The new house, God willing, will then have its own rector and will contain the noviciate. It will be dedicated to St Stanislaus Kostka. But up to now we are all novices: pray that God may be our supreme Master. Our Lady will be our Mistress of Novices — Mary, whom St Alphonsus calls the Mother of Perseverance. It was she who gave us this little house, as you know.

Write to me about your becoming a priest — though I would wish you to be indifferent, as far as your will is concerned, even over this, should it not come about. Forgive me for writing like this, and for charity's sake do not take it amiss. I do so solely because I am so anxious that you should attain all perfection. I repeat it is not that I distrust you; I distrust our human nature. Treat me with the same frankness at all times — I shall be eternally obliged to you. If then you have made up your mind to proceed this year to ordination, do so with such calm of mind and heart that you would even be ready to defer this step to a later date without getting upset, if you were advised to do so. I always bear in mind the saying of St Francis de Sales, who said that he was the

enemy of haste. So whatever we do, we should do calmly and without anxiety, without having our minds too set on anything. I well believe that you have no need to be told all this; but allow me to repeat these counsels, even if you have no need of them. They are admirable in themselves, and we should share the pleasure of recalling them. By following this teaching of St Francis we shall be less deceived by our imagination; since this is fed by haste, whereas calm and composure cool it down and restrain it. We must never put any trust in this lying power [i.e. imagination], which is the servant of self-love. We must never swell our minds with visions of greatness, but rather keep within the littleness in which God has placed us. We are poor — that is, little, in spirit ... Christ's poor ones. Goodbye. Jesus and Mary be praised.

R.

## 79. To the Marchesa di Melanges In Rome

Domodossola, 2 August 1830

Dear Marchesa,

Thank you very much for letting me have your opinion of the papers I sent you, containing a description of the proposed Institute. You will have gathered from this an idea of the effect which such an Institute would have, provided God saw fit to let it come into being: it would mean that many good people could be brought together into one body and organized so as to promote good, setting themselves against all impiety (which joins forces eagerly). Our times seem to require this, since good people, too, ought to have the right to defend themselves. I say this would be *the effect that would ensue*. But as for the founding of such an institution, I am profoundly persuaded that this could not be the work of man, but only of God; and that therefore in this matter it is necessary to banish any spirit of enterprise. Human ideas are fallacious, and are incapable of ever producing genuine good. This why we must take every care not to put any obstacles in the way of the divine goodness. Our attitude must be a negative one — in the sense of co-operating with the opportunities divine Providence may send us, but never seeking out such opportunities of our own accord. You will have noticed that this is one of the fundamental maxims expounded in the description you have in hand.

But there is another important thing to reflect on. Jesus Christ has already founded an organization of good people — in his Church. So we cannot create another one; rather, we must keep strictly within the organization of the Church, which subsists in the Pope, the bishops and parish priests. These are the centres — the first two certainly by the institution of Jesus Christ himself, the third put in place by the Church, following the plan of its Founder. So nothing must be detached from, unconnected with, these centres. In my view we are living in times in which no institution can any longer maintain itself except through the power of these indestructible centres on which the Church itself is founded. And if you examine the pages you have in your hand, you will see that they only describe a way in which one could, little by little, draw together — and bind together — all institutions for good, subjecting them to the powers appointed by Jesus Christ, though in a natural way, so that everything in this society formed by Christians may have its proper place and role. Just consider how the ascribed members and adoptive sons and daughters are joined to the superior of the society; the external secular coadjutors and lay people too are linked with those superiors — who, in course of time, will be transformed into as many pastors of the Church, if God calls them to this.

Now it is clear that all other institutions, whatever good end they may have been formed for, could form part of this kind of society, and hence could all be harmoniously incorporated into one body, provided however that they have for

their end the glory of God, and charity. So when you consider these principles — given your shrewd mind — you will understand very well the nature of a society which, although at present it exists only in germ, could bear much fruit in God's hands. But I ask you not to make use of what I am telling you in confidence because of the esteem in which I hold you, unless with the greatest circumspection. It is very easy to be misunderstood when one speaks of things that as yet exist only in the realm of possibilities. So let us be content to stick simply to the facts.

I am truly most contented with this hermitage of mine, and I look for nothing further. Let it be the Lord who acts — it is his grace alone that I wish for.

I remain your devoted servant,

Rosmini

## 80. To Luigi Gentili in Rome

Domodossola, the feast of St Lawrence 1830

My dear friend and brother in Jesus Christ,

It occurs to me that should God inspire you to come to us this autumn (although I am not pressing you to do this), there could be an excellent opportunity for you with the return of Count Mellerio. And why could not our Irish friend come with you too? If the Count could bring you, this — apart from saving expense for the journey — could provide good cover for your decision. I will get Count Mellerio to invite you to his fine villa, where he spends most of the autumn; and you could say that you were going to take a holiday, seizing the opportunity to see Milan and Lombardy. What could furnish better cover and better reason for your leaving? The Irishman, too, would have no difficulty in obtaining permission for an autumn journey. So do not let this providential occasion pass you by. I am not sure whether Count Mellerio could bring you with him, since I have not yet put the request to him; but if he can, think about the idea. When it comes to a vocation, we should never put off till tomorrow what can be done today. By this journey you will not be committing yourself to anything in the eyes of those in Rome; nor will you be put through the possibly dangerous ordeal of saying farewells. Have recourse to God and our Lady, and consider the idea. Do not let the thought of winter worry you; imagination always paints a blacker picture than the reality and if you wish to be generous with God, it is best not to think about such things. I have spent some of the winter here, and have kept very well. Our friends, Don Giovanni and Don Giacomo, have passed an entire winter here, and they say that the cold is not too bad. Also we have made improvements, and now have stoves and fireplaces. And, more important than such things, God will support us if we truly choose him for our portion and inheritance.

My dear friend, I say again, I am not putting pressure on you; but if you come, we shall begin our noviciate together and all of us will gain time. But act in freedom of conscience; my intention is not to create problems for you but to remove them. All I want is the will of God: I am indifferent over everything else; and when I believe that God wills one course rather than another, then I favour that I ask God that I may ever think like this. Continue to love me; and whatever you decide to do, do it calmly and with a cool mind.

All disquiet and disturbance of mind is wrong. The peace of Jesus Christ be with you. Greet Mr Quinn for me in the Lord. Your brethren Don Giovanni and Don Giacomo send you their greetings — as also do Isaia, Don Andrea and Toni. Write to me.

Yours affectionately in Christ,

Rosmini

## 81. To Don Giovanni Padulli in Milan

Rovereto. 2 September 1830

My dear friend,

How vain and empty are the things of earth! And how uncertain and transient! We are so much more secure if we place all our treasure in heaven. I can well imagine the situation you find yourself in, with so many things making demands on you. But it is God who has put you in this position, and you are doing his holy and adorable will when you bear with resignation the trials which surround you, and carry out your various duties promptly and diligently; they become occasions of merit when they are performed out of the love of God. This is ever the great art of divine Providence, as it purifies and perfects our souls through placing us in circumstances quite opposed to what we would naturally desire. In this way it mortifies and overcomes our self-will and keeps us alert. If things were otherwise, if everything went smoothly for us, we should sleep peacefully and know nothing of what it means to fight courageously. What a poor specimen a soldier would be if, instead of fighting, he spent his time sleeping! So let us arm ourselves solely with the weapons of faith, which are so effective and powerful — and this goes particularly, as you know, for our trust in our heavenly Mother her help alone can enable us to triumph over every obstacle.

Continue to pray for me and for our affairs up here at Calvario. Up to now God has certainly blessed them: praise and glory to him without end; it is he who does everything. Goodbye. My greetings to all who remember me.

Yours affectionately,

Rosmini

## 82. To the deacon Luigi Gentili in Rome

Rovereto, 13 September 1830

My dear friend and brother in Jesus Christ,

Your letter of 26 August caused me natural feelings of grief on learning that you are ill; but it also afforded me consolation on the spiritual level — on which, when all is said and done, we really live. I thank God from my heart when I hear you say that you discern tender signs of love in the bodily ailments that afflict you ... and that is what they really are, my dear friend: pledges of a love that is singular, precious and sublime. Although I am unfortunately without sufferings at the moment, every now and then I am reminded of my usual ailments: I recognize them as such, and realize that I cannot sufficiently thank God for them. There is no better time for exercising patience and humility than when we are ill. It helps greatly to put us in mind of the lofty judgements of God when we have a sense of the decay of our body, and of how imminent death may be; how suddenly it may come upon us! The thought of it puts an end to any vain presumptuousness of ours; the lies that our pride tells us give way to the truth of our nothingness; and whatever minimal confidence we may have in ourselves collapses within us, to be replaced by a surge of tender confidence in God and an abandonment of ourselves to him alone. Yes, my friend, this is the truth of the matter.

For the rest, I thank God over the news that the fever has left you — for it is God who gives life and takes it away. I hope your condition will improve from day to day. I very much want you to keep me informed of how things are with you; and if you cannot manage this yourself, get the good Quinn to do so — and give him my warmest greetings.

Count Mellerio had already written to me with news of the death of the Marchesa Patrizi. In this too we must see the hand of God, and adore him.

I hope that the preparations you have made over leaving [Rome] will bring you no adverse comments: after all, there can be nothing to cause anyone offence (it seems to me) if you take an autumn journey, even if this should become known. We discussed this step when we were together, deciding to leave everything to divine Providence. And how consoling it is to abandon ourselves into Gods hands, without enquiring curiously into the future. It was the wish of the saints to live quite uncertain about future events and resting tranquilly in the hands of God. Such a disposition is very dear to him, and this is your attitude, as I can gather from your letter; so it is no surprise to me that you find (as you say) in this humble and total conformity to the divine will, great peace, and constancy in your good resolutions. So too it pleases me greatly that you are quite indifferent (as far as your will is concerned) over the priesthood — ready to do only what your confessor and your superiors may decide. As to

what you say about the unworthiness you feel over putting on the vestments of a deacon, this is a light from God, who enables you to grasp the truth. For when we see within ourselves the corruption that original sin has brought about, our ignorance, our innate presumptuousness, and the concupiscence which is our heritage, these things so cast us down, and make us appear so vile and despicable in ourselves that we can neither grasp nor express them adequately and we realize that it is the sheer mercy of God that has freely infused into us the grace of baptism and has put life into our spirit, even though our flesh is still dead, and ever the source of death. It is because of all these things that the more we abase ourselves, the nearer we draw to the truth.

Meanwhile, I heartily embrace you in the Lord and in Mary, our loving Mother. Greet Mr Quinn for me. Take care of your health, and be careful to keep me informed about it. Salute all my friends for me; and pray always to our heavenly Mother. Goodbye. May Jesus and Mary be praised.

Yours,

R.



### 83. To Count Giulio Padulli in Rome

Rovereto. 14 September 1830

My dear Don Giulio,

The sorrow which you must be feeling over the death of poor Giovannina Patrizi — a sorrow I share with you — constrains me to write to you and express my sympathy, while at the same time unbosoming myself to you as my friend ... the Lord is merciful in all that he does, since he is all-good. And even if our case were worse than in fact it is, our duty is always to live disposed and ready to bow our heads and say, 'Blessed be his name' For what certainty can we ever have in these earthly surroundings of ours? None. And if we place any reliance on them, we act foolishly; for there is no reason why we should regard as stable, things which of their nature are changeable and transitory; which last only a short time and are subject to chance. If we see human beings in their true light, we shall see them taken away from us one by one and not be surprised, not be unduly upset at their loss. And this is because we shall live in readiness to see them vanish day by day, thanking God for every moment when they do *not* disappear from our sight For it is a greater marvel when they persist in being than when they flee from us and vanish.

I have written to Mellerio also, and I wait impatiently for news of you all. I can already foresee that you will derive comfort in the trial the Lord has sent you from prayer made at the foot of the cross, in the company of our sorrowful Mother, who lost so much more than we can ever know, yet was so much more resigned and steadfast in her sad loss than we ... I hope to see you soon — in fact at the end of the month, if nothing prevents that.

Give my affectionate greetings to Mellerio and Giovanni. You are all remembered in my poor prayers. Goodbye.

Yours,

R.

## 84. To Don Luigi Gentili in Rome

Domodossola, 30 October 1830

My dear friend and brother in Jesus Christ, to whom be all honour and glory,

... I hope that through the mercy of God your offering of yourself, together with that of the immaculate victim, will be sincere and complete. And if that is the case, then you will be a happy man. But while we hope, we still have- to distrust ourselves, since only God knows our hearts, at- least until we are able to see into their depths in God.

I have told our dear friends and brethren about your letter, and they have rejoiced in the Lord over what you say. They will pray for you over the fever — indeed we pray for you every evening in our community devotions; and when we say the litany of our Lady we repeat the invocation, *Salus infirmorum*.

I have good hopes that the pure and bracing air of Calvario will mend your health and conserve it. Here we are all healthy and happy, and ready to welcome you when the time comes which the Lord has disposed for your arrival among us. We have already agreed that there is no need for Mr Quinn to speak of this as if it were to be a prolonged absence; while we remain calm and tranquil in the situation God has placed us in, all of us contented as we keep our hearts in peace, unconcerned with the things of this world. So too we are ready to accept with peace and tranquillity of spirit whatever may be the will of Providence. And who knows whether that will have us remain here or go elsewhere? We are simply pilgrims, and our dwelling place is temporary, not lasting, wherever we may find ourselves. Or rather it is fixed in only one sense — that is, that any change will not be of our seeking, from any inconstancy or restlessness of ours. If Mr Quinn says he is coming to spend some time here, he speaks truly. Nor could he say more. But prudence on your part and his, (as you commend yourselves in this matter, too, to the Mother of Prudence), will find this a just expedient since you will be fulfilling the divine will for you. But keep me informed about your feelings in the matter, and about whatever occurs. I am glad to hear about the gold medal won by Mr Quinn<sup>21</sup>: embrace him lovingly for me in the Lord.

Here the Lord's goodness is ever more manifest I have received many requests from ecclesiastics who want to join us; so far I have accepted into the house only a young subdeacon [Clemente Alvazzi]. This is how I came to have him here, sent by Providence: the Vicar General of the diocese asked Loewenbruck to take one of the best of the seminary students and give him the last two years of the theology course, since for his health's sake he needed to be somewhere

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<sup>21</sup> Andrew Quinn was awarded the gold medal for dogmatic theology in this year, 1830.

with a more bracing air than that of Novara. We accepted the request, and when the young man came he told us that his health was not the only reason why he had asked the Vicar General to arrange for him to be taken in here. More important was the desire he felt to withdraw from the world and join our number. This is the way divine Providence acts. We are very pleased with the young man: he is happy in this place of retirement and devotion, and his health is excellent. As for the others who have applied, I am reflecting on the matter, so as not to act without due consideration. I pray to God about it all, and would ask you to do so too. I have all the more need for prayers, since my companions here, in order to put things on a more regular footing, wished to appoint a superior, and have elected someone who is quite unworthy. [He is of course referring to himself.] When they first put the idea to me, I took time to meditate over this, asking God for help and guidance. Then I told them that we would observe a fast for three days, and use the time to pray to God from our hearts — after which we would do whatever his interior voice had counselled. On the fourth day they were still of the same mind. So I resolved to make a general confession and manifestation of conscience to one of them, giving him permission to make use of this knowledge to make a recommendation over the decision, so that (knowing plainly all my faults) they would not wish to elect so great a sinner. On the Sunday, which was the fifth day, they came to inform me that they persisted in their determination to have as superior one who was so little worthy of the position. I then accepted the decision provisionally, not wishing to go against the divine will. I begged them to use three ways to help me to carry so great a burden: first, by ceaselessly asking God to help me with his grace; second, by putting up with my many defects and shortcomings, accepting them as a cross which the Lord was sending them; and third, by their exact and perfect obedience. For I pointed out to them that once they had elected me as superior and put themselves under obedience, it meant that they were obliged in conscience to obey all the commands they were given; and they could only satisfy this obligation by forgetting the person who had to give the commands and keeping before their eyes Jesus Christ, in whose name the command was given, and whom they should have the intention of obeying. After this, I thought it well that the first order I gave should be to my own advantage; so I enjoined Don Giambattista Loewenbruck to do me the kindness from then on of being my admonitor and confessor, obliging him in conscience not to conceal from me any defects which he observed in me. Last of all, bearing in mind both my own unworthiness and the example of Jesus Christ, I said that I would begin to exercise my office by serving them at table for a fortnight.

This is how there came about a situation that makes me pray to God without ceasing that it may not bring bitter fruit for me — I mean by adding new failings to the ones I had good cause to lament before this turn of events. So you can see how my claim on your prayers is now greater than ever! I beg my dear friends not to abandon me in this hard trial, not to leave me on my own in

the dangers that face me! But it is no use lamenting: if I were to try to pour out all my dismay, my fears, my feelings over this new responsibility, this letter would not hold them all. I will go on instead to tell you something of what is happening here.

Today the time of the First Probation is due to begin. We shall make the various examens laid down by the Constitutions, together with the instructions and exercises. After this the noviciate will take place. In the house we are gradually introducing the rules, one at a time; and as a result there is an atmosphere of greater regularity, of religious peace and loving joy. At the same time we do not forget the works already taken on; and in this connection work will begin within a few days on our second house in the town, so as to get it ready for the purpose it will serve. [It was to house a community of priests who would undertake various charitable works in the locality; while the Monte Calvario house would be devoted to the giving of retreats to the local clergy]. I hope it will be ready by the autumn. I have also received a further stimulus from the Holy Father, Pius VIII, to pursue our enterprise and send forward the Constitutions for approval. This made me hasten to send them to the Curia of Novara, as proper order requires. Since all this happened without any initiative from me, I see clearly that the finger of God is in it.

But I have no time for more: the bell will soon go for our recitation of Matins, and we maintain punctuality. So goodbye for now...

Yours,

Antonio Rosmini

## 85. To Don Pietro Orsi at Rovereto

Domodossola, 9 November 1830

My dear friend,

Thank you for having consoled my mother by giving her a candid account of my health and situation. Tell her too that, thanks to your good advice I am protecting myself even more against the cold: I am having the stairway closed in, so that going to the refectory does not mean facing the open air; and in the refectory itself a good stove is being installed — one that could even bear comparison with the German variety!

So all in all, things are getting better, at least as far as the body is concerned. Would it were the same story with the soul, my friend — for that is the really important thing ... in fact it is everything. True wisdom is to be found in that small and simple book that we call the gospel; it is all there. And if it is not too much temerity on my part I should like to recommend you to read just a few verses from it every day, taking account of the truth that these words come straight from the mouth of God, and that they are to be understood in all simplicity, without distorting them by forced meanings to suit ourselves. This practice takes only a few minutes; but in that short time we hear the words of life. For my part I would encourage you as much as I can to do this, and I hope that your heart will be consoled when it is warmed by these words of the gospel and made fervent through hearing them.

This counsel flowed from my pen as I was telling you about the satisfactory state of my bodily health. But this body of ours, however healthy it may be, is undoubtedly going to perish soon enough. This is the one immutable truth; and I say *Amen* to it because I am happy that this is how things stand; because truth is dear to me.

Goodbye, my dear friend: I will write no more now, except to say that I embrace you and Don Paolo affectionately. Give my warm greetings to the arch-priest. Continue to love me — I rely on that~ and you also must have no doubt of my love for you.

Yours,

Rosmini

## 86. To Don Pietro Rigler, Rector and Professor of Moral Theology in the seminary of Trent

Domodossola, 10 November 1830

My dear brother and friend in our Lord Jesus Christ — grace and peace.

Your welcome letter of 22 October reached me after some delay, but it consoled me because of the news it contained, in which I see the mercy of God.

The thing that pleased me most of all was the union and concord among you, and the perfect submission shown by Don Giulio [Todeschi] and the young men you mention, and of whom you have great hopes. This perfect union and submission to one's own superior, regarding not the person but the one he represents, must truly be the great means of obtaining the grace and blessing of our Lord Jesus Christ who was pleasing to his Father because of his obedience. Here too my hopes are based on the signs which seem to me to show that we are making progress in the virtue of obedience ... [He goes on to describe how he was elected Superior General, as already reported in Letter No.84.] Your charity will show you how much I need your prayers.

I was consoled also to hear the news you give me of the college, and of the suitable people you have found to make use of it. I hope that great benefit will result from the spiritual conferences you have already initiated. The *Maxims of Christian Perfection*, which you have chosen as the material for these, seem to me to be good foundations to lay, and in my view they can never be sufficiently understood, never sufficiently discussed, meditated on, analysed —and observed. As you will have noticed, they form the basis of all our Constitutions. We here have also started to use them regularly as the theme of our conferences. Up to now the conferences have dealt with matters that seemed to me most urgently needed for the good order and proper running of the house, such as (1) the importance of distributing well the hours of the day and keeping punctually to the horary; (2) silence; (3) putting time to good use; (4) bearing one another's defects; (5) obedience; (6) constant recollection — and other such matters. But now we shall begin to speak about perfection, and about putting flesh and blood on the bones of the *Maxims*. And an extra reason for this is the fact that we took All Saints' Day as the beginning of the *First Probation*, which we shall make as nearly as possible in the way laid down in the Constitutions. When we have dealt with the *Maxims*, we shall either go through them again or take the *Common Rules* (of which I will send you a copy) as our subject, leaving the *Maxims* for another time. Conferences such as these, which deal with matters of primary importance, call for repetition time after time.

It was a good idea on your part; I think to reduce the tiring labour of hearing confessions, since you already have more than enough to do, with your other

commitments — which you cannot at present abandon. As for what you say about the discouragement of spirit you feel: I believe this is willed by God so as to make you experience human distress and bring home to you the need you have of him, our only source of strength, and to make you always have recourse to this source, and trust in him alone. If we always felt full of strength and courage, perhaps we would forget to ask him continually for help and support. But when we feel our inadequacy, we are at every moment forced to cry out, *Lord, save us or we perish*. The Lord is always pleased to accept these cries coming from our humility and the realization of our powerlessness. Even if these come of a lack of liveliness in our faith, the experience of our own nothingness can have the compensating quality of increasing our faith through sending us to prayer. And as regards the other problem you face through the burden of the body, with its demand for suitable nourishment and rest for its well-being, this too I see rather as a good reason to recognize in ourselves a disharmony, a deformity which we inherit, and which makes us cry out, exclaiming: *Who will deliver me from the body of this death?* But I also believe that it is no reason at all to be disturbed, And in this connection, here are two useful rules: (1) when our duties oblige us to suffer various privations and mortifications, we have to take good care not to allow the demands of our body to have their way, but to ensure at all costs that the spirit triumphs; (2) but if it is a matter rather of the mortifications and privations which we freely impose on ourselves, then we have to do what we can with liberty of conscience; and as for what we are unable to do, we must not be in the least disturbed or discouraged in consequence. Rather we must make an act of sincere humility, saying to ourselves, What wonder is it that we have not been able to mortify ourselves? The wonder rather is that we have not done worse. By such an act of humility we recognize our extreme weakness, which unfortunately causes us to fall short even in the smallest matters. And this will help greatly to remove from us any temptation to consider that we amount to anything in the way of the spirit — while the truth is that we are nothing. Someone to whom I suggested this rule, of compensating with an act of humility for some mortification that we were unable to perform, told me that he found it very effective for acquiring peace of mind and heart. Before he had made this a practice, he had been distressed and discouraged whenever he had failed to carry out some mortification he had imposed on himself. But afterwards, recognizing his own insufficiency, he was able to be tranquil.

Again, as regards our instinct to look for peace and rest in the well-being of our bodies and in experiencing the over-lively sensation of being well-nourished, I confess that this too is a great affliction for the spirit a great cause of fear, a great cross; and this is something I feel continually. All the same, the important thing is to keep our spiritual intention always active and directed to God; and as the holy Fathers tell us, this is the highest point of the soul. Here is what the *Imitation* says: As long as you live, you will be subject to changing moods, whether you like it or not ... but the wise man, who has thoroughly taken

to heart the lessons of the spiritual life, takes his stand high above all these drifting emotions; he pays no heed to what he may be feeling in himself, does not care from what quarter the wind of inconstant moods may be blowing. Instead he directs every aspiration of his heart towards its rightful and desired goal.' (Book 3, chapter 33); and this is the way of holy liberty of spirit to aim with the eye of the mind always at God alone; to rest all our free-will there; and as regards everything else, to put up with ourselves in all our weakness. Certainly we are not capable of great things; and if we are well persuaded of this we shall be contented at all times, and we shall thank God that we do no worse. We can do no other than recognize this and abandon ourselves to God. Let us love one another in him; since charity is the badge of the disciples of Christ. In this we are of one heart and one soul.

Here, a few days ago, we were joined by another companion, one of whom I have good hopes. It was Providence alone who sent him. We must receive what is sent to us in this way with thanksgiving. Let us pray in complete accord. Every evening in our community devotions here we include you in our prayers. Embrace dear Giulio for me. Don Giovanni, who works hard as usual, sends you affectionate greetings in the Lord — and the same to Giulio. Goodbye.

Yours affectionately,

Rosmini



## 87. To Cardinal Cappellari in Rome

Monte Calvario, 10 December 1830

... I was about to write to your Eminence when I heard the unhappy news of the death of the Pope. It was both unexpected and sad, especially in view of these times, leaving the Church without its Head. Although I can imagine how these circumstances must have put your plans out, and although too the Pope's death has put an end to some of the reasons I had in mind for writing to you, all the same I cannot entirely abandon my purpose of visiting you by letter, so to speak, both to convey my condolences on the loss of the Sovereign Pontiff, and also to ensure that I am not denied the satisfaction of getting in touch with you at a time when you will be entering the Conclave — and since we do not know the mind of the Almighty, there is no knowing whether later on I shall be able to approach you with that filial confidence and freedom which your kindness has hitherto afforded me.

The purposes I had in wishing to write to you were, first, to tell you about my situation and about the newly-born Institute, since this seemed to be required by reason of the paternal affection that you have always shown me and the interest you have had in my affairs; and in the second place I wanted to ask for the various indulgences and faculties that the Holy Father, Pius VIII, had encouraged me to request for those entering the Society and for those who co-operate in the charitable works which it undertakes. This I wished to do, so as not to appear to make little account of such spiritual benefits; and I was going to ask your Eminence to obtain these for me, sending you a list of such indulgences and faculties as I believed to be apt for the present time. But since this second motive no longer exists, because of the death of the Pope, I will restrict myself to the first.

The Lord has so far caused everything to go well, smoothly and in good order. As for the number of subjects: I have had various requests from excellent priests wishing to enter the Society; but for the present I thought it best to leave them for a while outside it, while directing them in works of charity according to the spirit of the Institute, so as to see how they got on and come to know them better. I took this course so as to conform myself to the mind of Pope Pius VIII who, in the first audience that your Eminence obtained for me, advised me to proceed slowly and with much circumspection. In addition, as you know, the Institute does not require all its members to live together in community houses, but allows them to live externally if the Superior judges this to be a better arrangement.

As for regular formation within the Institute, my companions wanted to elect a superior, since this seemed to have become necessary. And I have to confess, with real embarrassment, that they were set on choosing me, despite all I could do to escape this burden. In the end I accepted, but only provisionally. And

having taken on this responsibility, I was fully persuaded that the first thing I had to do was to try to form myself (though I can report only limited success in this), and my companions too, according to the spirit of the Institute. As regards this latter aim, I have had the consolation of seeing them make daily progress towards solid piety and charity. This is certainly a blessing we owe to the mercy of God.

In the interim I have had various opportunities to establish new houses; but I did not consider it wise to do so, preferring rather to lay a firm foundation and strike roots before we extend ourselves —again according to the mind of the Holy Father, as well as the spirit of the Constitutions. I have accepted only one house, one which used to belong to the Ursulines, in Domodossola. I did this with various considerations in mind; first, because here at Monte Calvario we have only the house; our use of the church and grounds is only contingent; the church is directed not by us but by a Canon who lives nearby; and secondly, the grounds are not mine but held only on a limited lease. Hence it seemed a good idea to have a church and grounds in Domodossola, so that if the need arose it would be possible to transfer down there the principal seat of the Institute. Furthermore, the house here, although I could not acquire the adjoining grounds (as I would have liked to do) and have only the use of the church, will be quite adequate to serve for a work much desired by Cardinal Morozzo — that is, the giving of retreats to the local clergy, especially those engaged in the parish ministry. In this way, in the main house (which will be the one in Domo) there will be a community of priests under a superior, and these will look after as many works of charity as they can cope with; while in the Calvario house, where we are now, there will be a small number of priests under a rector, and they will be engaged in one work only~ retreats for the clergy. And this house will be subject to the one in Domo. In this fashion there will arise the two sorts of house envisaged in the Constitutions: one devoted to the exercise of charity in general, the other to a specific work of charity. I hope the house in Domo will be opened next spring, unless divine Providence disposes otherwise.

I still have to report to you about the Constitutions. Pius VIII, in the last audience I had with him (as I told you) expressly ordered me to present the Constitutions in writing in order to have the approval of the Holy See; but he told me first to have them approved by the Bishop of the diocese. When Count Mellerio took his leave of Pius VIII the Pope was good enough to ask him to remind me of the instruction he had given me (which in fact I remembered very well), saying to him these words (which Count Mellerio reported to me): 'Tell Rosmini to do as I said, and send the Constitutions.' Hence, knowing the Pope's wishes, I had a copy of the Constitutions made, and saw to it that this was first sent to be examined by Mgr Scavini, the Vicar General of the diocese (Novara), so that they could then be submitted to Cardinal Morozzo. Once they had been approved by the Bishop, I meant then to send everything to you, availing myself of the kind offer you made to me before I left Rome, by which you showed

yourself willing to do with them whatever you felt was most in conformity with the mind of the Pope himself. But now of course the whole matter is held up.

The various kinds of charity which have been asked of us here are going well, thank God. If I may, I would ask you to convey my respectful greetings to Cardinal Zurla. I am not writing to him now, simply so as not to inconvenience him without need. I would also ask you to give our respects to Cardinal Morozzo

Kissing your hand etc,

I am your obedient servant,

Rosmini

## 88. To Don Pietro Rigler, Rector of the seminary at Trent

Monte Calvario, 14 December 1830 (circa)

My dear brother in Jesus Christ,

You call me Father, yet I am no more than an erring son — so please do not use this expression, which embarrasses me and make me feel ashamed of myself. Call me rather 'brother' — though even that does me too much honour. But enough of this: as far as love is concerned, I can be, I am, your brother.

Your letter was a great consolation to me, and to Don Giovanni too — in the first place for what you say about yourself. Thank God you are growing stronger, and have extended your meditation to forty-five minutes. I regard meditation as of very great importance: we use a written scheme based largely on St Ignatius. It is a good idea for everyone to learn a sound method of meditating. In fact the three main instruments of the spiritual life are first this practice of meditation; then examination of conscience; and finally praying with intelligence and full attention.

I was also glad to read about your notion of bringing about a move towards union next Christmas Day. I have one or two things to say to you about our plan. First, though, I should prefer it if you did not say: 'If the Lord opens the heart of our Sovereign ...' It would be better not to think in these terms: if the work is of God, everything will come about that is needful for a good outcome. Let us abandon ourselves more blindly to Providence. In my view we must do all the good we can at present, tranquilly and without worrying at all about the future, or over things that are uncertain. To do that is always a source of disquiet and this is the devil's way of always keeping our imagination active and taking away our peace of mind. *Take no thought for the morrow*. So I would advise you to speak to your companions along the lines you have in mind, only adding a recommendation that we should keep ourselves united in spirit and ask for ever greater graces and mercies, always purifying our souls, until (if this is the will of God) we can arrange things better and establish closer links, (even externally) so as to join together. Meanwhile our bonds will consist in our common aim and our shared means: in our equal willingness to abandon ourselves to Providence, allowing ourselves to be moved by it without in the least anticipating its designs; in mutual charity and frequent correspondence. In these ways we shall show one another all that the divine mercy has in mind for us, whether we are in one place or another.

I will tell you what my idea would be: there is no need to have a positive approval from the government, as I have ascertained by consulting well-informed people over this matter. It is enough if we keep the Bishop *au fait* with our situation. I have been shown that there are in fact various Congregations in Italy that have never asked for political approval; yet since

they have good relations with the relevant bishop, the government too is quite content with their position. Indeed this close understanding with the bishop is necessary anyway, whatever plans we have; and I have good reason to trust that we shall obtain such approval, judging from certain favourable indications that I have received about the matter. On the other hand, it is well to go slowly and to take one small step at a time, without any talk of formal approval, and without putting ourselves forward as in fact constituting a religious society. Indeed the truth is that we really are a humble private society, our union consisting purely in our spiritual links, which are concerned with our spiritual state; so that the superior really is a father and a spiritual director. Don Giovanni is of the same opinion. And it seems to me that thus we shall be united in a way more in accord with the mind of the Holy Father, Pius VIII, who recommended to me so strongly that we should keep to the plan of following the indications of divine Providence rather than anticipating them, taking one small step at a time. So try to bring it about that your companions do unite together, as you proposed, in a small congregation, with the intention of joining us in spirit and if God so wills, forming a total unity. Meanwhile get them to pray for their confreres who, though removed from them physically, are joined with them spiritually in the Lord. In the same way we all pray for all of you in our community devotions each evening. Get them to carry out their duties with simplicity and to continue with the good works already begun, having but one end before their eyes — God and our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom alone be honour and glory for ever and ever. *Amen. Amen.*

On the second Sunday of Advent we had the consolation of receiving into the Church another Protestant — and this with some solemnity and a large gathering of people, who were much edified. This is the seventh such conversion that we have witnessed, by delegation from the Cardinal. Let us thank God for it.

So too I am very pleased with our clerics, and it seems to me that through God's mercy every day sees an increase in religious virtue. I alone remain like a rock that holds out against the sea of the divine mercies. So for charity's sake pray for me especially! Greetings to Don Giulio *in osculo sancto*. We all send you our love in the Lord. All honour to our Lord Jesus Christ and to his holy Mother, Mary.

Yours,

Rosmini

## 89. To Don Luigi Gentili In Rome

Domodossola, 14 December 1830

I thank God, my dear brother in Jesus Christ, that you are giving your time to the good work of instructing little ones and leading them by the hand to him who said: *Suffer the little children to come to me*. How good it is to spend oneself for him, doing his will! I am also glad to hear that you have begun to read the *Origin of Ideas*. I am fully persuaded, my dear friend, that it will help greatly if we devote our energies to such studies [philosophy]. In my view there is a great and widespread need for this in all branches of knowledge, and especially theology. I have had the consolation of receiving letters showing support, in which men of weighty reputation express their view, upon reading the work, that the teaching in it *will one day become the commonly accepted doctrine of the Schools*. [The italicized Words are those used by Cardinal Nembrini in a letter to Rosmini.] May God bring this about, for I cannot see the texts [used in the Schools] being corrected until we get back to having a philosophy held in common and agreed by all men of sound opinions. If you can, do familiarize yourself with the *Origin of Ideas*; and if you run into difficulties, write to me.

I am waiting to hear you explain what you had in mind when you mentioned a possible advantage which may accrue to the Institute (as you put it) — though you add: 'I think this is something from God, but if so, poor me!' Are you talking about some dignity which may be bestowed on you? But if this is so, could you not say straight away that you wish to join us here next spring? And in any case I cannot see how this dignity could be useful to the Institute. So I can only conclude that it must be something else that you have in mind.

You did well to await the reply of Mr Quinn's uncle. I beg you to use great caution in deciding on any step; and before you take a decision that affects the Institute, please get in touch with me about it. In this way we can sort everything out together; and with God's help we can act with maturity and prudence, even in the smallest matters. With regard to Mr Quinn (and the same goes for you), I see no reason to say more, when you leave, than that your travels are taking you here, where you mean to spend some time. Once here, you can live from day to day with complete trust in that divine Providence which daily sustains the whole world, and never allows those who entrust themselves to its loving embrace to come to harm. That Providence is clearly active here every day: it infuses better order into everything, and (what is more) it brings about an advance in the spiritual life (through the action of divine grace) among my companions here, in spite of the obstacles posed by my shortcomings. The First Probation is nearly finished, and on Christmas Day my companions will start on the Second Probation. (I did so myself a little earlier, under the direction of my spiritual father, the good Don Giovanni [Loewenbruck]. I hope

for much benefit from these spiritual exercises. All of us here are more and more persuaded, as the days go by, of the singular grace and mercy shown to us by God in bringing us together here at the foot of the cross. Nowhere else can the truth of things be seen so clearly as it can here. Help us by your prayers, and ask Mr Quinn to pray for us his companions, who already love him greatly and always pray for him.<sup>22</sup>

Our little group studying moral theology seems to be getting on well; the clergy who are taking part in it are pious and devout... Our other works of charity are also going well, thank God. It seems that the Lord means to add to our small numbers — but enough of that~ may his will be done. I am quite happy with my present companions and with the present state of things. If God wants to grant an increase, let him bring this about — and may his name be blessed. I cannot tell you who are the new aspirants, but you will hear in due time.

One thing I must mention to you: our Bishop and Cardinal Morozzo, when speaking of you, made it clear that they were not at all fully persuaded of the sincerity of your resolutions. But I am quite certain that you are not deceiving me, since you have opened your heart to me frankly and expressed your firm intention of not giving in to flesh and blood but of corresponding promptly with God's urging. But I should be glad if, when the Cardinal comes out of the Conclave, you would pay him a visit on my behalf, and at the same time show him your mind and remove his doubts concerning your sincerity and firmness of purpose. It may even be that if you ask him (without saying that it was my suggestion), he will bring you with him to Novara. But do as you think fit.

God has called to himself the Head of the Church. How inscrutable are his ways! Let us adore him and pray to him for the outstanding needs of the Church. We make this prayer together here, morning and evening. Our dear Mother, Mary, will not allow us to perish. Her name is written on our hearts, together with that of Jesus, her Son and her God. Thank you for the consolation you give me when you speak so affectionately of our Mother in your letters. Continue to do so. Goodbye.

A. Rosmini

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<sup>22</sup> Since the name of Andrew Quinn frequently occurs in this correspondence, at the time when it looked likely that he would join the Institute, it may be of interest to say that he did not in fact do this, but became, first a parish priest in Ireland (in Dunleary) and subsequently Vicar-General of Dublin. Later, when Gentili was giving missions in Ireland, Dr Quinn tried to persuade him to get Rosmini to send some of his men to teach in a new college. But Rosmini declined, citing his previous unhappy experiences when (as at Prior Park) Rosminians had worked under a superior who did not belong to the Institute. He was also aware that Propaganda might want Pagani or Gentili or both as bishops of the new hierarchy in England, and he did not think it advisable at that juncture to deprive himself and the institute of his comparatively few subjects by placing some of them in Ireland on any sort of permanent basis.

## 90. To Mgr Luschin, Bishop of Trent

Domodossola, 23 December 1830

[All but the first three paragraphs of this very long letter are given here. The gist of the omitted part is given in Letter No.94 (below) to Gentili. Rosmini speaks with gratitude of the Bishop's invitation to open a house in Trent, with no strings attached', as he says to Gentili. He goes on to describe to the Bishop his own thoughts and activities; and although there is some overlap here with what is given in various other letters, these passages deepen our insight into Rosmini's mind.]

[Rosmini recalls that] ... Towards the end of 1826 your Lordship was kind enough to invite me to say whether I wanted any post in the diocese ... I felt obliged to bring you up to date over my situation, explaining the principle on which I acted, which was to remain perfectly tranquil in the state in the state in which I found myself, trying to fulfil my duties, without taking on anything of my own accord, but at the same time not refusing whatever Providence put before me to be done, and remaining perfectly indifferent over serving the Lord in one way rather than another, and being guided by the rules of prudence in this matter also. Among these, one of the main ones (it seemed to me) was: not to take on any work which would put obstacles to the carrying out of a greater work already begun. It was mainly on this principle (and not, I hope, out of any inertia or pusillanimity) that I declined various honorific posts which were offered to me during my stay in Rome, both at the end of 1823 during the pontificate of Pius VII and on later occasions (I mention these things to you simply because I feel I ought not to conceal them). My refusal of these offers was also in part because I sincerely felt unworthy of such honours, as well as out of fear of responsibilities which would be heavy for anyone, but much more so for me, given that I felt myself lacking the necessary strength.

It was again on the same principles that I was induced in 1826 to absent myself, for a limited time, from my beloved homeland. I wanted to pursue the studies which I had begun, and which in the judgement of knowledgeable people seemed to promise that I might do some little good! So too I did not want to neglect the opportunity which was offered me of exercising charity. It was for these reasons that I decided to go to Milan, since in a small place like Rovereto the necessary facilities for my studies were much less than those available in a large city; and in addition (as I mentioned) I felt the call of a work of charity which had been urged upon me. Your Lordship well realizes that a Christian, and so also an ecclesiastic, has duties towards his own region. But when I left mine, it seemed to me (and still does) that should I succeed in being able to give help on a wider scale through my studies (and I was encouraged to believe this by the view of judicious persons), I would be of more use to my home region than by merely being physically present — by which I could well have done no more



than displease people because of my shortcomings, which are more easily seen at close quarters than at a distance.

Certainly it is a fact that when divine Providence causes us to be born in one place rather than another, we have a duty to be useful there; but this will not come about unless we can suppose that in that place the opportunities of doing good are more available, more to hand, and the first that offer themselves. But if it should happen that this is not verified, then it seems to me in conformity with the intentions of divine Providence and the spirit of the gospel not to neglect any occasions of doing good that are presented to us in any part of the Church, since souls have the same value everywhere, all being equally redeemed by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. And although our natural inclination (and one which I have always felt very strongly) is to restrict ourselves to our own region — and even more to those in our own family circle (so to speak), and in the last resort to ourselves, (since it is the same restrictive tendency which operates in each of these cases), all the same I believe that it is only the gospel principle of universal benevolence that (if it is preached and diffused) can bring true peace to the world, and the end of all the discord which insinuates itself among people. And with peace would come every other good. Such a universal blessing, renewed in each particular place, would mean that our own regions would be inestimably benefited. It is true that it would not be immediately obvious from what lofty principle this benefit had derived: the principle of universal benevolence may seem vague, precisely because there is no instantly visible effect from it.

As regards my studies: I was afterwards confirmed (by my revered memories of Pius VIII) in the conviction that I ought to persevere with them — as I previously wrote to you: the spontaneous directive which the Pope gave me was something that I saw as an express declaration and confirmation of the will of God. And in general the Holy Father, among the other counsels he gave me when I took my leave of him, was this: that I must 'try to do good by way of the intellect, since men — especially in our time — need to be led not so much by outward manifestations but rather by reason'. He said much to me in this connection, and he added these memorable words: 'We ourselves had doubts over this; but after fervent prayer to the Lord to obtain light on the matter, we have come to this conclusion.' Hence he not only enjoined on me the writing of books, but recommended me in whatever I did to try always to bring about a conviction of the truth through reasoning. And I think this recommendation is very valid, even independently of the authority from which I received it, since it seems to me, from what I know of the world, that the origin of almost all our present evils lies in the lack of a Christian philosophy, both theoretical and practical. And since I have here touched on the advice given me by Pius VIII, I will say again that I made a resolution never to anticipate arbitrarily divine Providence, but rather to follow it in all things, letting myself be led by it wherever it might take me ... and this despite the fact that, as far as I know,

the Pope was not aware that this precise principle was the general rule which governed my conduct.

As to the work of charity I spoke of as one of my motives in going to Milan: this came to an end of itself, and I found myself released from it. But then I was presented with various other opportunities of perhaps doing some good; and these have led me to become involved in other works, though without this ever resulting in my incurring any specific obligation to any one person. And one of these works was precisely the little union of priests and laymen which came into being around me here at Monte Calvario di Domodossola (which is a sacred spot dedicated to the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ.)

I can say that I have never taken any initiative to bring about this work (which already seems to be acquiring a certain stability), but I have acted simply by going along with the representations and wishes of pious persons who have spoken to me about it (as I have reported to your Lordship on one or two other occasions). For quite some years (to sum up the story), a pious lady whom you know well — the foundress of the Congregation of the Daughters of Charity — has been urging on me the formation of a Congregation of Sons of Charity on similar lines to those of the one she founded for women. I have always resisted these pious invitations, first, because I consider myself quite unequal to undertaking a work of such importance, and also because to accept would mean abandoning my studies and restricting myself wholly to specific works of charity; and this would clash with my two principles, first of persevering with things already begun and not taking on new works which would interrupt the old; and of not sacrificing anything which served the *general* good and limiting myself to a particular activity. But since this holy lady increasingly pressed me by her letters, at last, in 1825, I decided to reply to her that I would go along with her wishes only on two conditions: (1) if some people presented themselves to me of their own accord and asked me to receive them so that they could share their lives with me; and (2) if they also shared my way of thinking — that I would not undertake any kind of charitable work of my own accord, but *would* exercise charity in any way that my neighbour himself asked of me, provided that it was not beyond my strength. These conditions seemed unlikely to be met by the Society. And so two years passed by, while I lived contentedly in Milan (with the conditions still not verified). But in 1827 a priest did come to me and ask to join me. I told him that I would accept him if he really wished to embrace the principle of living retired, and not taking on any work of charity unless our neighbour were to ask for it. This idea seemed to him to be an admirable one. Then the Cardinal of Novara gave me this place; and at this point I moved here — not yet into a religious house as such, but simply into a place of retirement, which was at the same time a pleasant spot and suitable for the sort of life which I had in mind to live, should it seem that Providence had sent me a companion. When I came here I wrote to the Cardinal saying that I simply had in mind to make a sort of spiritual retreat, and that if I found the place

agreeable I would remain for a time. I did not specify how long, because I did not know this myself.

Since then my household has grown with the arrival of a priest or two, a cleric or two, and a layman or two. And my family' has continued on the same provisional basis and on the same principles. Although our life has been most secluded and given to study, looking no further, all the same there has been no lack of requests which involved me and my companions in various kinds of charitable work, such as the instruction of Protestants, the education of clerics, spiritual direction of prisoners, missions, retreats, teaching Christian doctrine, hearing confessions, caring for the sick, and so on. When I saw how the work was gathering pace with its own momentum, I decided (so as not to act mistakenly) to appeal to the Holy See and ask approval. This was one of my motives in going to Rome. (The other was to improve the state of my health.) When I put my request to Pope Pius VIII of holy memory, he greatly encouraged me to continue the work adding that he would grant me the various indulgences and spiritual favours I had asked for. He then asked if I had composed any Constitutions, and when I said that I had, but had not up to then asked to have them approved, since I was content with knowing that what I was doing was not disapproved of by the Holy See, he then added, in a very kind fashion, 'We understand that you seek only a negative approval; but all the same we instruct you to take the necessary steps also to gain a formal approval of the Constitutions, first having them approved by the Bishop of the diocese where the Institute is, and then sending them to the Sacred Congregation, so that We may in due course approve of them.' And later, too, the Holy Father was good enough to send a message to me: 'Remember to do [as We said] and send [the Constitutions].'

Among the other charitable requests that I received, his Eminence Cardinal Morozzo told me that he wanted me to found a house given over entirely to the giving of retreats, especially for the clergy who had charge of souls. I promised to do so, not wishing to refuse this good work which had been asked of me without my seeking it out and to this end I have set about modifying a religious house in the city of Domo. In this way the Lord so arranged matters that I now have the beginnings of two houses, [again] without my seeking this. But I did all this without taking on any precise obligation, looking on these priests as forming part of my own family; and my intention is to keep things on this private basis. In course of time, and once things are on a more stable footing, I had in mind to get my companions to make the three religious vows (and some of them a fourth vow over the 'missions'<sup>23</sup> of the Sovereign Pontiff). But even so,

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<sup>23</sup> The reference to the 'missions' of the Sovereign Pontiff is perhaps best explained by a quotation from the Rule of Life of the Institute of Charity: 'Some of the priests, chosen from among the coadjutors and nominated by Father General, take a fourth vow of special obedience to the Pope. By this they bind themselves to accept any

the idea I have in view is to keep them still without obligations, quite private (with the agreement of their own Bishop), retaining the form of a private family of friends who live a life in common, rather than a religious society publicly recognized as such.

So now your Lordship is truly in the picture over everything, and is in a position to make a Judgement over what I am inclined to say in response to your kind proposal. Because of my principle of never refusing to do any good works that are asked of me and are within my powers, I must of course want to act in accord with your gracious invitation — the more so since it concerns my own beloved diocese and (I say this in all sincerity) my own beloved Bishop. But since in your kindness you leave me entirely free in the matter, you will see that I could not do this work except with respect to the principles I have so far followed, one of which is: not to interrupt a work already begun so as to undertake another. And all the more in view of the fact that although I have not undertaken a positive obligation towards anyone in particular, I have in effect, by the very fact of the work we are doing, made a kind of public commitment. So I wholeheartedly embrace the prospect of forming in Trent a union of priests on the lines of the one here, provided however that I do not have to abandon this. And further, because I am in favour of the principle of not opposing a greater good, whether for myself or for the companions who have gathered round me, it is necessary for the Institute not to be limited by restrictive bonds, although it limits itself, naturally, when it undertakes works of charity which present themselves or are offered to it by a bishop, a parish priest or by other people, contenting itself with doing such works as are within the powers of its members, in these days when it (the Institute) has not yet struck deep roots. Now the whole spirit of your esteemed letter seems to me to be in entire agreement with the sentiments I have described. Trusting in this, what I have in mind (given an indication of your agreement) is to go — after Easter, or at latest after Pentecost — to Trent, and stay there for as many months as may be needed to initiate the work which your Lordship in your pastoral zeal invites me to undertake.

I ask your pardon for the length of this letter, but I wrote in such detail because it seemed to me my duty, before beginning anything, to inform you fully about my whole situation. Kissing your hand etc.,

Your humble servant,

A.R.

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mission in the service of the Church even if this should require the sacrifice of their lives. These are the “presbyters” (No.6.)

## 91. To Don Giambattista Terasconi in Rome

Monte Calvario, 30 December 1830

I am grateful that you remember me (little as I deserve it), as your friendly letter just received proves. From this delightful retreat of mine I often visit in thought my friends in Rome, and it seems to me that I am not seldom in the company of Terasconi, Giuliani, Barola and the rest, who bear with me! I am glad to hear that you are getting on with your studies. As for your uncertainty over the future: you will find that the Lord will give you the light to know his will if you ask him fervently. There is no reason why you should be apprehensive over the appearances of this world or be drawn from your path by things which, like flesh and blood, must perish. Allow me to advise you to be tranquil and to have faith (and to find peace) in God. Light will be given to you if you give yourself to the Lord without reserve — and you will not know whence it comes or whither it goes.

As for the public disturbances: there is no need to take great account of these; and far less should they furnish a reason to defer the carrying out of a holy plan or a good resolution. We must put our trust in God; and for our part we must give the enemy no scope for taking advantage of these unquiet times, which quite possibly he causes for the profit he can extract from them — cunning calculator that he is. Consider well, my dear friend: the current disturbances may offer a pretext which our limited generosity seizes on in order to remain undecided; and meanwhile we may fail to listen to God's voice. Certainly we have to live in one place or another; and someone who lives a life dedicated to God in some sequestered spot has no more cause to fear what may come of human events than someone who lives in the world. For my part, I can truly say that I feel very serene and secure in my present state, among this excellent company of friends; and whatever may happen, I will do no more or other than I would do if I were alone — that is, go somewhere else, if there were disturbance here; since while we are in this world we have to live somewhere — as long as we have to carry with us this wretched body of ours (which occupies space) and are not yet disembodied spirits (which have no need of space). And so I have no worries about either external events or the future. I go straight ahead along my own path, and what little good the Lord gives me to do today, I take care not to defer till tomorrow. At least this is my firm intention; though God knows what imperfections there are in everything I do.

My companions were very pleased to get your greetings, and they affectionately reciprocate them, and wish that the conversations which you say you dream of having with us could take place in real life. But rather than speaking of such things, we must leave it to the Lord to do as he wills.

My cordial greetings to you. Pray for me. My best wishes to all who know me there. think well of —

Your Rosmini

**92. To Michele Parma<sup>24</sup> at Valenza**

Domodossola. 1 January 1831

My dear Sir,

I am firmly convinced that, if only it were possible to bring about within the Italian people genuine concord, mutual esteem, and a desire to work together; and if in this connection they were to enter into the great questions which are the concern alike of religion and of people generally (and, I would add, of nations), we should soon find that from such deliberations there would emerge an imposing body of thought, of a loftiness perhaps hitherto unknown, offering incalculable advantages to humanity. Such is the esteem I have for the Italian genius! As I see it, it combines the quickness and clarity of the French, the accuracy and weightiness of the English, and the depth of the Germans. But on top of these things it is gifted with a great calmness of its own: a calmness which it preserves even in the midst of great fervour, since even the Italian imagination has an order about it, and allows time to reach that full and perfect resolution of the questions in which truth is to be found — so that when the questioning ends, real knowledge begins.

And let no one think it strange that I make such great account of the spirit and genius of my fellow-countrymen, even though I do not as yet see the results that I have mentioned: because too many causes have up to now put obstacles in the way of that unity which alone can produce an imposing greatness out of the genius of individuals. While these remain isolated and solitary they are bound to be weak and have only a hidden power. *Paulum distat inertiae celata virtus*. [power which remains concealed seems to differ little from sluggishness.] But if men of good understanding, and especially those who are well-disposed and religious, were to take thought over uniting among themselves and searching together for that good which at present they agree in wanting but pursue separately, hardly knowing what they are doing, then I would see in such a move the seeds of very great benefits, and the beginning of something which could make real the hope which is in my heart — a hope which I foster as I foster my own life. And when I further consider that Providence has placed in this nation the supreme ruling power of Christendom, I cannot do other than believe that

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<sup>24</sup> Michele Parma entered the Institute of Charity thirteen years later, and taught philosophy in the college at Domodossola. After a few years he left the Institute; and though he subsequently tried to re-enter it, he was not accepted. However he maintained cordial relations with it as an Ascribed Member.

my country has reserved for it a great destiny also in the spreading of human knowledge; since such knowledge (in my view) cannot grow other than from the divine root of the gospel.

In saying these things I do not imply that I believe (any more than you do) that there can be successive improvements in the essence of Christianity: this is the word of God: it is as unchangeable as the heavens. But Christianity, and particularly Catholicism, is capable of immense development by which it can gain a lustre, a glory ever more beautiful and impressive. I have been confirmed in this way of thinking not only through meditating on the words of the gospel, which are inherently capable of an unlimited fruitfulness; nor again simply because of the very striking beneficial effects which the gospel has produced in the world during the eighteen centuries which have elapsed since it was first announced; but also by the very words of the prophets, who foretell the grandeur of the triumphs [of Christ's teaching], and whose vision has not yet been completely fulfilled. The developments which I envisage do not imply any change in the essence, the substance, of Christianity but are rather so many practical applications of it to the needs of men and women in their differing circumstances, and particularly to their combining in the various societies which they have created and will create. Catholicism will bring light everywhere, and will everywhere bring order, peace and love ... all the blessings which can come to mankind from the love of peace.

Yours cordially,

A. Rosmini-Serbati

### 93. To Count Giambattista Giuliari in Rome

Calvario, 13 January 1831

My dear Count,

Many thanks for your kind letter which assures me that you have not forgotten me, but (little as I deserve it) hold me in esteem. I am particularly grateful for the interest you show in this little Institute, which came into being solely through the action of divine Providence, and continues to grow and be strengthened with its gentle help. I could give you many examples to show you how the hand of God is to be seen daily more clearly in this development but I will content myself with asking you to thank the Lord from your heart for it all, as you tell me you in fact do, and to beg him ever more in his mercy not to allow us to put a foot wrong, but to guide us all safely in *viam salutis aeternae* [in the way of salvation]. It is through prayer that we are enabled to do everything; but only prayer that is humble, trusting and persevering, as St Augustine says.

Blessed are those who pray! And this is the profession assumed by a priest, who *constituatur in iis quae sunt ad Deum, ut offerat dona et sacrificia pro peccatis* [who is ordained for the things of God, so that he may offer gifts and sacrifices for sin]. This is the whole of the dedication proper to a priest this is his whole life. And you will be blessed, because by putting on this livery (which I too, though unworthily, bear) you will enter into a service which is so consoling, so secure, so noble and sublime; one which means living in this world yet conversing with God, speaking with him at once of our own woes and those of our brothers and sisters, the rest of humanity. *Nostra autem conversatio in coelis est* [But our conversation is in heaven]. There can be no half measures — that is certain. Woe betide the priest who wants to compromise with the world, with self-love, and with the vague and restless whims of self-will. *Dominus pars hereditatis meae* [The Lord is my portion and my inheritance]: this great affirmation which you will solemnly pronounce when the bishop's scissors touch your head to cut away all superfluities, [the reference is to the tonsure] will become the law — the law which you choose and accept, the law which will govern the rest of your life. And again, woe betide those who have these words on their lips but meanwhile in their hearts harbour an attachment to some other inheritance! They lie, *non hominibus sed Deo* [not to men but to God]. Alas too for those who let themselves be scandalized by the bad habits of such priests and are led to follow their example. This matter of bad example, my dear friend, holds great dangers, and unfortunately it is all too common in our world. But the priest who in recollection meditates on the truth, and who is blessed with the advantage of being able to breathe the pure breezes of a retired solitude sacred to God, or who takes for his companions only a few holy priests of exemplary character ... only such a one is able to fortify himself against the sort of deadly indifference, coldness and empty-headedness which



are found in many who receive the imposition of hands yet who afterwards live a life of ease (or worse), and act as if they had never been ordained.

I started on this theme almost without noticing it. But I see that in your letter you do ask my views on the matter and on what the future of it all may be, so I am not too repentant. And since this is what you wanted, I will add that, on account of the true friendship I feel for you, I must conjure you to make your sacrifice to God not a matter of half-measures but complete and entire, I would have you remain quite indifferent concerning what exercise of charity divine Providence gives you to carry out, because this golden indifference is, I believe, the best disposition in which to serve God surely and according to his will, and to protect ourselves from the wiles of self-will, which is always intent on betraying us, since it urges us to follow our own inclinations and please ourselves, as well as to listen to the empty promptings of self-love, of the great deceiver who loves to upset and win all that is good. Oh how fine it would be if all priests were intent on serving not themselves but God alone, and for his sake the good of their neighbour, and were indifferent to everything else (as they ought to be)! Then they would indeed begin to be genuine priests of Christ. And what great victories such a body of priests would win over the enemy of mankind! What unending benefits they would confer on humanity; what union, what strength, what triumphs they would gain for the Church! And what merit and great rewards they would earn for themselves!

This is my advice, then, my dear Count, contained in these friendly words. I know you will not take it amiss if I have poured out to you what is in my heart...

Yours affectionately,

R.

## 94, To Don Luigi Gentili in Rome

Domodossola, 18 January 1831

My dear friend and brother in Jesus Christ, to whom be all honour and glory for ever. Amen.

I am not waiting a moment to reply to your letter, in which I find ever new signs of the mercy of God and of our Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom we must always be grateful, as we are consumed with the desire to suffer something for his sake, and if possible to obtain the greatest grace of all: that is, to spend our life and shed our blood for his glory: he is the object of all our desires and of our will — of our very existence, since we were created for him.

The English Catholics are so dear to my heart that I do not know what I would not do to help them in any way possible: I want to neglect nothing whatever that Providence suggests I could do to their advantage. I would wish even to give my blood for the glory of our Lord, little as my blood is worth. So I have thought about all that you said in your letter, in order to find some way of acceding to the wish of Mr Phillips at the earliest possible moment as far as is compatible with the prudence required by our Rules (as laid down in the Constitutions), and with the whole spirit of our Institute. So I think that, if you feel in sympathy with the idea of this mission, you might do just one year of noviciate with us, in which to prepare yourself for the work and absorb well our Rules and maxims, gaining an insight into them and putting them into practice; then at the end of this year I should be quite happy to give you two companions from amongst us and send you to Leicester. There, Mr Phillips will be pleased if you will open a house and take on the care of souls. Glory be to God through our Lord Jesus Christ for ever. And so dear to me is an enterprise of this sort that in order to omit nothing on my part that could help to ensure a favourable outcome to this work of the Lord, I should be ready to part with my dear Loewenbruck, who is at once my support and my chief adviser, and to give him to you as one of your companions. I would do this so that you could have with you a man who is wise and reliable, intelligent and well-versed in our affairs, as well as being inflamed with a tremendous zeal solely for the things of God — possessed too of great physical robustness, and equal to hard exertion and demanding activity. Ponder on all these matters before God, in great tranquillity and peace, using long and fervent prayer. And if you feel resolved and ready, get in touch with Mr Phillips who, I am sure, will feel bound to favour this work. Please let me know your feelings about this as soon as possible, because I have the idea much at heart. In the meantime we shall all pray as usual, asking God to give us the light by which to know his will and to grant us the uprightness of soul to wish for and do nothing other than this. And on your part have no fears with regard to the ways in which this project can be carried out. Do not be anxious about it, or let it cause you any disturbance of soul as regards the

means: because God (you may be sure) will see to everything, and through his adorable Providence will sort matters out, provided it is a work of his. As I said, you will have a year's noviciate with us, but you will continue to be a novice even when you are at work, since this is how we must proceed at the start — as indeed all institutes must until they are no longer beginners. I put this matter, together with all the rest of our little activities, into the hands of our dear Mother, so that she will look after-them in her own fashion. So enough of this.

Now I want to tell you about something that happened to me in which I seem to see the hand of divine Providence. (I could tell you about many other cases, but this will do for now.) Last autumn I had to go to the Tyrol (I wrote to you about this) over various matters. And there I had a visit from a professor of dogmatic theology in the Trent seminary. He knew nothing about our establishment at Calvario; but after speaking to me about the many needs of that region, he began to unfold to me a plan which he had formed, together with one or two other good priests, a plan to join forces in a kind of religious society so as to meet the needs of souls. This priest is extremely zealous (which counts for much more than the fact that he is of noble stock). He urged me to join wholeheartedly in their plan. It was then that I decided to tell him frankly about our little establishment and our rules of conduct. He at once became enthusiastic, and consulted the Rector of the seminary about it all. This man is in every way a rare spirit, and has the name of a saint in the city. He too is one of the group who have united together as I described above. He wanted to hear from me about everything, and afterwards he assured me that, whereas up to then he had been undecided, he was now certain and clear in mind, since in what I had described to him he found just what suited the times — and himself in particular. To be brief, then, I sketched out the plan of a community with the Rector of the seminary as its head, bringing in obedience and the manifestation of conscience (which the others would make to him as their superior], (though the others, apart from Todeschi, the one who first spoke to me, were still in the dark about the work), as well as the bonds which at that time were possible between people who did not live in community. At the same time I told him to be on the look-out for a suitable house which might be bought (or at any rate leased) in Trent and to let me know as soon as he had settled his ideas. However there remained a seemingly insuperable obstacle: the government was very nervous over the establishing of new institutions, and the Bishop appeared to be under the government's thumb. But in my usual way I made little account of such snags, and told them [the group] not to worry about these matters but to leave everything to Providence, even though in their eyes it seemed impossible that the scheme would succeed. Now, what would you? See how Providence works! I recently had a letter from the Prince Bishop in which, after sending me Christmas greetings and so on, he invited me to form in his diocese a union of priests at my pleasure. He even offered me the use of his recently enlarged seminary if I thought it would be suitable for my purpose. I could hardly believe my eyes when I read this letter, even though I knew the

Bishop's hand well enough! And notice this: he could have known nothing of what had passed between those priests and myself, because we had kept the matter to ourselves, fearing that he might learn about the plan before the time was ripe. [But see Letter No. 95 for the light it throws on the situation.] Moreover the invitation which he extended to me was couched in the kindest of terms, leaving me perfectly free to act as I saw fit. All this seems little short of miraculous! I replied that in the spring I would go to Trent to initiate the work and that I would stay until the superior of the new house was settled in. But I said nothing about the subjects that divine Providence had already apparently provided me with for the new foundation.

God be praised; let us thank him from our hearts. But let us also remain humble, always mindful that death may take us out of this life at any moment. With this thought in mind we shall therefore not worry about tomorrow or let our imagination toy with things of the future. We have to crucify such fantasies along with the flesh, and conduct ourselves with diligence, coupled with distrust of ourselves and confidence in God and in the patronage of our dear Mother, Mary, dealing with the things which Providence has put into our hands, while we make it our care to co-operate with God's designs with simplicity of heart, constancy of mind, and unwavering perseverance in our good resolutions. In this way we shall carry out what God has given us to do for his glory (which is the one aim we have in view) — and so we shall attain our eternal salvation.

It gives me great consolation to see that you are penetrated with these maxims, and with a realization of your own nothingness. Let us never slacken in the labour of humbling ourselves and purifying our intentions; we must never presume to do anything of ourselves, since we amount to less than nothing.

I am glad also to hear that you are entering fully into the ideas contained in the *Nuovo Saggio* — they are those of the Christian tradition. For, my dear friend, we really need a Christian philosophy; with it we may hope to bring about good in many ways. The need to pursue an intellectual approach is one of the ideas which my recollections of Pius VIII call to mind.

All of us here cordially embrace you in the Lord; we pray constantly for you that God may bring to fruition the good that is in you. Goodbye.

Yours affectionately,

Rosmini

## 95. To Don Pietro Rigler, Rector of the seminary of Trent

Monte Calvario, 31 January 1831

My dear brother and friend in Jesus Christ...

First of all, for the sake of the love of Christ which binds us together and which, I trust in the Lord, will never allow us to be separated for all eternity, allow me to make it clear that I could not approve of the step which you have taken with regard to the Bishop without letting me know about it. My dear friend, we must never allow ourselves to be carried away by impatience over having to wait, since this is quite contrary to the spirit that we have chosen, and it would destroy in its origins that Institute which it would seem that God in his mercy, through the working of divine Providence, wishes to bring into being. This is something very close to my heart; and the action you have taken of your own accord — something always dangerous, and against our Common Rules — has caused me much sadness. I therefore beg you never again to do such a thing, but rather to rely on divine Providence, with great faith, while you try to carry out well the present works, with no worry about the future, but committing it to God.

And should it enter your mind to take any step, first get in touch with me about it so that we may consider it maturely together and see whether it is genuinely in accord with the spirit of prudence (which is the Spirit of God), as our Constitutions require.

We need to be convinced that one thing alone is necessary (*porro unum est necessarium*): and this is to save our souls and possess God within us. What more are we looking for? If God wants anything of us, surely he has his ways of speaking to us — he who gave us language? Or does it cost him any effort to make us know his will? Or will he perhaps conceal from us what will be good? No, certainly~ he is all good, and we alone are evil. He is also wise, and he knows the times and the moments *quae Pater posuit in sua potestate* [which the Father has fixed by his own authority]. Let peace dwell in us as we carry out our good works in tranquillity — that is enough: peace, because we possess our God; the lively faith and longanimity so much praised by scripture in the patriarchs; and that attitude of *sustine Dominum* [wait on the Lord] so often found in the psalms. Yes, we must await the Lord: he will come, but we must not anticipate him — that would be unpardonable presumption and stupidity on our part. After all, what do we know? How can we say what would be good or what would be bad for the Church? No, we are poor, ignorant people. What can we do? Nothing, because we are nothing. How can we think of doing anything [of value]? It is our place simply to be humble and at peace — at peace in our nothingness, for fear that we may provoke our God further. Rather, we must hope to placate him with our humble prayers. Only God can make use of what is truly nothing, should he

so wish, in order to perform some work, since he calls *ea quae non sunt tamquam ea quae sunt* [(calls) into existence the things that do not exist].

I pray you in Christ, then, to consider this maxim, which is the foundation of this union which God alone has so far initiated. Recommend it also to the others, so that we may put a brake on that vain imagination which is always trying to run ahead; and instead act with that maturity of judgement which alone will allow us to walk in the light of the Word. Certainly it costs effort to restrain our fantasy, which is for ever trying to look into the future, and plans to do great things ... which gives rise in us to endless and mistaken desires. Against this enemy we have to wage war; for if we succeed in winning the victory over it we shall have mastered our pride and the hardness of our hearts, and we shall deserve to be called 'taught of God'.

This is why all our Constitutions (as you will know if you have well understood them) turn on this one first point. So let us think about the present, and rest content in our small houses. We must not think about other foundations, in this diocese or elsewhere, until the will of God reveals itself. As for the one there, since what is done is done, I consider it too as something used by Providence, which can make even our mistakes into means by which to carry out its designs. It is very important to understand this: that although we do not wish to limit ourselves in any way, neither do we want to undertake anything simply of our own accord, but rather follow the Lord's leading when he gives us a work to do. Meanwhile we live contentedly in our retirement. The Constitutions are simply rules of prudence covering possible situations; so we should not be thinking about the whole development which the Constitutions envisage [as possible]. It is God who, if he so wishes, will bring it about in his own time and place. Our thoughts must be on the particular works we have in hand. So let us limit our considerations to the two houses which have been begun here and the one which is to open there, together with the works of charity which go with them. But no more than that.

Although we must not allow ourselves to be limited, or to have obstacles put [in the way of our work], what I have said above is an essential element [in our spirit], and one which I shall enlarge on when we can speak together. We must have no thoughts of seeking approval from the government: we are a private body of priests, working with the knowledge and approval of our bishops and ecclesiastical superiors. Anything that could in principle impose limits on us is contrary to our Society; and if there is any place where we cannot work without having restrictions imposed on us, then it is not the will of God that we should do anything there. Let us have no doubts: Jesus Christ set no limits to his Church; and it is a Protestant heresy to say that the Church forms part of the State. We take our stand with Jesus Christ and his Church, which is called 'Catholic', and have no fears; nor should we submit ourselves to the arbitrary limitations which some people try to impose on the catholicity of the Church itself. In his letters to me, the Bishop concurs with this view, making it clear

that he has no intention of limiting my aims to his own diocese, but is well content that good should be diffused in the universal Church as a whole.

Let us all pray, united in heart; we do this here every day, in common and in private. Every time I say Mass I do so for my own soul and for those the Lord seems to associate with me. It is prayer that must bring everything to maturity — but prayer, needless to say, made for our own souls, and not for other ends. That is all. If we all attend to [sanctifying] our souls, we shall put no obstacle to God's designs. There is nothing more we can do, since we are not capable of producing good. The Lord diffuses his goodness wherever he meets with no let or hindrance. Our thoughts, then, must be focused on removing any such obstacles and preserving peace [of soul]. This is the wisdom described by St James (whom you quote in your letter), the wisdom which must be ours: *fructus autem iustitiae in pace seminatur* [The harvest of righteousness is sown in peace]. Yes: say these things, in my name too, to your dear companion, so that he may restrain his zeal and go gently, with sure steps, always wisely, and in accord with obedience, even in small things. We are not to be solicitous: let us leave to Providence the outcome of what we are doing, since God alone can do all things and we can do nothing. So we must not use great efforts and work hard in the belief that it is on such exertions that the spread of the kingdom of God depends. Only God can convert souls: they are all in his hand. Think how gently our Lord himself behaved — with no violence, nothing overheated, in his words. He sowed the seed and let it bring forth fruit on its own — that is, through his secret working. So too, at the right time, and in the right place, we must act, with complete confidence in the way God works in souls. These are the principles that govern our Society: it must be formed on them, not relying on the will of man but on that of God, whose influence extends through the very nature of all things, and reaches from end to end sweetly and with power: *et disponit omnia fortiter et suaviter*.

And guided by these same principles, we should be slow to take in further companions: rather we should be content to be few, as we are now, not looking for more. If God sends us more, then we shall accept them with joy; but it is not for us to anticipate God's designs, not even in desire. Of those who are now in this house, there is not one who was not clearly sent by Providence. But I shall await the opportunity of speaking with you, rather than tell you now about the ways in which divine Providence is daily and smoothly aiding the Institute to make progress. We are always content: whatever state our Society finds itself in, it is always complete and perfect it wants nothing else. All our desires must be concentrated on advancing every day in virtue; whether we are many or few matters little in relation to attaining the end of our Society. And that end is simple: only the [sanctification] of each of its members. And this can be achieved whatever state it finds itself in. That is why I say it is always complete and perfect.

My dear friend, this is the great work to which we must give our attention in the beginning: the formation of the members of the Society! It is to the noviciate that all our thoughts should be given at present, so that we may proceed with maturity and certainty. I embrace you warmly in the Lord, in whom I love you and all of our company.

May the cross of Christ seal and sanctify us all.

Yours affectionately,

R.



## 96. To Don Pietro Rigler at Trent

Domodossola, 12 February 1831

My dear friend and brother

I can assure you that it was extremely sad news to me to learn that D.G.'s obedience was so imperfect. I was hoping rather that he would become strong and exemplary in this virtue. I should like to write to him; but first I want to hear from you whether you think this would be a good idea or not. Meanwhile, tell him from me that if he wants to do the will of God he must be obedient~ otherwise he will not succeed in anything, and his merit will vanish like smoke. What counts with God is not great external actions, but having a heart that is humble, obedient and upright before him: *melior est obedientia quam victimae* [obedience is better than burnt sacrifices]. I should like him to read, meditate on and learn by heart the letter of St Ignatius on obedience. We ought to see this letter as written to ourselves. If ever our little company is to be capable of doing any good, it will be through obedience. Only in this way shall we sanctify ourselves, which is the great aim of our Society; for we can desire nothing more than this. Do not give any thought to the number of our members: the three of you are quite enough. Everything depends on our forming ourselves well; have no doubt about it; God will help us, and will lead us gently where he wishes us to be. Let us abandon ourselves to him alone, and have before us no other aim than to please him and to rest calmly in him, content always with our present state, looking for nothing more, and seeing it as a work that is complete. The only thing we must be discontented about is our insufficient love of God; in this we must look to see daily progress in ourselves — in loving God and in following the way of perfection. Our love must aim not at preaching, or doing great things for other people: rather at purifying our own consciences and living ever more faithful to the word of Jesus Christ, who is the truth, and the life of our souls. We must stand at the feet of Jesus, meditating on this with Magdalen. If God would have us do anything, he will see to it; we must not be solicitous over this.

Here we pray daily for you. Do the same for us - you whom I love in the Lord - for all of us. Greet your companions warmly from me.

Honour always to Jesus and Mary.

Yours, Rosmini

## 97. To the priests Lissandrini and Teruggi in Arona

Monte Calvario, 28 February 1831

My dear fellow-priests in the one Lord, Jesus Christ, to whom alone be honour and glory,

Forgive me for not replying before to your letter, in which you are evidently still of the same mind after praying, and wish me (despite my defects) to become your spiritual father. My various occupations have prevented me in recent days from being able to find the leisure to be with you by letter, as I wished to do. But I hope that today will give me the opportunity to do so.

First of all, then, having prayed over the matter, I am willing to go along with your wishes (which seem to me to be holy and directed to God's glory) over the spiritual guidance you suggest. I will look on you as an extension of this beloved little family of mine at Calvario.<sup>25</sup> *Quam bonum et quam iucundum habitare fratres in unum!* [How good it is for brethren to dwell together in unity]. And this union (by which we have the joy of being brothers) will not be a matter of our being in the same place, but rather of our oneness in God: it is he who is our spiritual home, and it is delightful to dwell together in him.

And now I must speak to you of something which I regard as essential if your holy desire is to work to good effect. There is a maxim by which this little household is regulated and which is the rock on which it is founded. As long as this maxim is observed by any society or by individuals, they will be blessed. It is simple, humble and 'ordinary'; but we have no other foundation, no other principle of conduct; and all our Rules, both in the present and in the time to come, derive entirely from this maxim — which is: 'to concentrate on our own sanctification and salvation' not concerning ourselves with our neighbour except as a way of pleasing God or sanctifying ourselves.

This maxim excludes the false zeal which makes a man more inclined to be solicitous for the salvation of his neighbour than for his own; and often this comes of a hidden presumption which flees from looking at his own defects, and which - as if there were nothing amiss with himself - makes him imagine that he is necessary to the salvation of his neighbour. Such a way of behaving is also a sign of a lack of faith in the goodness and Providence of God; as if God, the Father of all mankind, did not concern himself with or provide for all souls, without any need for us or for our action. But anyone who knows God and knows himself also will regard himself as useless, and will remain humble and wholly occupied with amending himself, deploring his own sins, and working day and night to know them, correct them, and reform himself. This, my dear brothers,

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<sup>25</sup> This arrangement represents in effect the beginning of Ascribed Membership of the Institute of Charity.

is the great labour that we must take on ourselves; and we shall do so if we are truly humble and recognize that there is no other state or attitude that is fitting for us except the self-deprecating and abject one of penitents. And it will never come about (if we are penetrated with this truth) that of our own accord we shall assume any assignment or dignity unless obedience obliges us to do so or we fear perhaps to oppose the will of God, and thus go against that Lord the possession of whom is the sole aspiration of our souls. We must consider seriously that if we attain to the purification and amendment of our souls, and hence justice within ourselves and the possession of our God, then we have attained a good such that there is nothing left for us to desire: we have gained everything; we are filled; we are blessed. So what should our thoughts be fixed on if not that which Jesus Christ has taught us in these words: *porro unum est necessarium* [but one thing is necessary]? Our minds and our hearts must be simplified and made sincere, since in this is contained the simplicity of the Christian life.

But unfortunately our mind, while we live in this world, fills itself up with a mass of false ideas — though they may appear to be pious; and our heart fills itself up with a mass of false and useless desires — though they seem to be religious! No, we must rid our minds of such encumbrances, our hearts of such vain rubbish. Instead we must put on the simplicity of thought and feeling that is to be found in the gospel. There must be only one object before our minds, before our hearts: purity of conscience; a taste for the words of Jesus Christ; the possession of God. Then how greatly we shall be lightened, relieved of the load of the vexatious burdens laid on us by our secret presumption, as well as by the inflated teachings of the voice of this world! This is why Christ says: *Come to me, all of you*.

To sum up, then: let the one end of our union be our own salvation and perfection. This is the sole aim of the Society of Calvario; and the whole outcome of our efforts will depend on understanding well this most simple end and putting it into practice. This great foundation which, in its simplicity and oneness characterizes this Institute — this is what I suggest to you now that we should lay.

Each one needs to make for himself a little book of *Rules*, in which to write down the regulations and means that, little by little, I will let you have, according to opportunity and need. And in the meantime, this will be the first one: *Finis huius societatis est salus et perfectio propriarum animarum* [The end of this Society is the salvation and perfection of our own souls]. The other means which for the moment I suggest to you consists in certain religious exercises aimed at the purification of the soul. These need to be undertaken with courage and persevered in with fidelity. And they comprise a *meditation* in the morning (if possible lasting an hour), which should be made without the use of a book (the material having been prepared the previous evening, by reading or in some other way). This practice, meditation, is fundamental: it is that

which by its weight, so to speak, stabilizes and keeps in equilibrium the whole person. In the second place, two short examinations of conscience are to be made, one before the midday meal, the other in the evening. In the third place, it would help if at least once a week you were to meet together for a spiritual conference on subjects best calculated to bring compunction of heart, to purify the soul, maintain recollection, and lead you to act in everything with the gravity and maturity which befit priests.

These are the three exercises which for now I consider suitable as a beginning. If you find them practicable, write in the book this second Rule, by which the exercises mentioned above are prescribed: *Omnes et singuli praefinitum sibi tempus suae conscientiae bis quotidie examinandae, meditationi, et collectionibus spiritualibus impendant cum omni diligentia in Domino*. [Let everyone be careful to employ, with all diligence in the Lord, the time set apart every day for the two exams of conscience, for prayer, meditation and spiritual reading.] I hope that by taking on the practice of these few exercises with fervour, and above all with fidelity, you will soon find yourselves contented and consoled; since it is by long and serious meditation that we can learn to know ourselves and God, to esteem our union as a great good, and no longer take account of anything else.

So I shall be waiting to hear from you in due course about what has been your experience in the use of these exercises, and about any difficulties you have had with them (for the devil will certainly put all sorts of obstacles in your way if he can, in order to discourage you — this is his usual way of acting.) Finally, I shall be happy to receive news about yourselves.

One thing I would particularly recommend is the reading — again and again, and with the greatest attention — of that little book you know of, entitled *Maxims of Perfection*. This can only be relished if it much chewed over and thought about.

To finish: we are all closely united in the love of Jesus Christ. Our love for one another will be the sign that we are his disciples. Let us pray without ceasing — and it is in prayer that we shall find our union. This is true above all when we are of one heart and one soul before the altar, since there we share the one bread, and this nourishes us all, making us live with the same life — and so is the symbol of our ineffable oneness. So, glory to Jesus: he is the Vine of which we are the branches; and glory to Mary, our dear Mother and our hope: she is the greatest branch of that Vine.

Your affectionate brother and fellow-priest,

A.R.

## 98. To Don Pietro Rigler at Trent

Domodossola, 2 March 1831

My dear friend and brother in our Lord,

I am writing only a few lines to you as I am pressed for time, since I have taken on the task of giving the Lenten exercises here which means that I have to be constantly preparing sermons (you can imagine what it is like).

Meanwhile, thank you for all that you have done. I will follow exactly the advice of the Bishop of Cremona.<sup>26</sup> I would again advise you not to speak of our affairs to others; but if you have anything that you would like to discuss, talk only to him.

I am very pleased also to hear that you have well understood and entered into that fundamental maxim of ours - viz., to be concerned only with our present duties, cutting off with a single blow all our desires, and leaving God to act in everything. Oh, if God were to give us the grace to be his faithful servants and hold fast to his holy word in us, would that not be enough? What more could we wish for? Do we mean to make so little account of his grace [as to want more than that]? Disquietude, inordinate zeal these things should be far from us: they come of a mistaken spirit, and they enter into us by way of the imagination so as to disturb our soul. Let us be quite firm about this: that we want one thing only - to save and make perfect ourselves. From this it follows that whether the Society is big or small, it is always perfect, because it can always attain its end.

As for conferences, I strongly recommend them to you, and I should like them to deal chiefly with the interior life, the religious life... You must restrain Don Giulio when he goes too far: prudence and simplicity are the important things; so impress upon him that God has no need of us poor creatures in order to do good; so that if we are really humble and persuaded that of ourselves we are 'good for nothing' (which is no more than the truth), we shall hang back, so to speak, and never undertake anything of our own accord but only out of obedience - and even then with fear and trembling. Oh, what a fine thing is our presumption! But let our Blessed Lady be our model and our teacher of that hidden life which was so much better than the conversion of the whole world. .. Our life is under God, and he alone has power. As for us, have we not plenty to occupy us in amending ourselves? Is there nothing here that calls for our attention? Is everything entirely satisfactory? *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*

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<sup>26</sup> Carlo de' Sardagna of Trent, after ruling that diocese, both as Vicar General and Vicar Capitular, was appointed Bishop of Cremona in 1830. He was a cousin of Don Giulio Todeschi, and was very attached to the Institute of Charity.

The little book of the *Maxims* needs to be made a flesh and blood reality: it is not enough just to have read it once or twice. I have seen it produce excellent effects - not at the first reading, but after being much meditated upon. We make use of it in our conferences, and in each of them we take some small section, which forms the subject of the day's meditation, over which the conference is held. Let us have no doubts, but rather abandon ourselves wholly to the Lord, my dear brother. We pray for all of you: do as much for us. It is in prayer that good is effected.

Goodbye for now. Those 'few lines' I was going to write to you have multiplied without my noticing it. Keep me informed about everything; greet your companions warmly from me, and love me in the Lord, as I love you.

What you should enjoin on Don Giulio is that the main thing is diligence over his teaching responsibilities: this is the will of God. It is uncertain whether other things come into this category. He will lay a good foundation if he gives much study to theology: this will be of great value for him. He must not let time slip by.

Yours, Antonio Rosmini

## 99. To Don Luigi Gentili in Rome

Calvario, 16 March 1831

My dear friend and brother in Jesus Christ,

I need not tell you that, along with all the faithful, we have thanked God for the election of the Holy Father. Nor shall I say more about this, since I am pressed for time. This is because, on top of my other occupations, it has fallen to me to preach the Lent sermons. It was unavoidable.

My whole aim in this letter is to tell you that in my view the time has come when you should no longer defer your coming to Monte Calvario, where we all eagerly await you. Time is precious, as you know, and God takes account of every moment. So delay no longer, but take courage and leave behind all that is dear to you in Rome, exchanging these things for our humble retreat and the companionship of the brethren the Lord has given you. *Take farewell of your home and your kindred.* It is only through your promptness in obeying God that you will gain the grace to do all the things that he perhaps has in mind for you in the future. It is my belief that you will now show in practice the genuineness of your dispositions.

Have no fear of political troubles, but trust in Providence. Around here everything is calm and orderly. If confusion should break out on any scale and it seemed prudent to withdraw to somewhere even more secure, we have a place in the Tyrol, where there is nothing to fear. And there could be no finer spot. But, as I say, we are not really anxious: we trust in the good God whom we wish to serve, and in the Mother of us all.

As for leaving Rome: do not imagine that you are leaving there for ever; think rather that you are first making a pleasure trip, so as to enjoy the blessings of spiritual seclusion for the good of your soul. If when you left Rome you could resign yourself never to see it again, the sacrifice would be the more perfect; so if God gives you this grace, act upon it. But I think you would be unwise to let your imagination conjure up temptations, since I consider it likely that by God's disposition you will see Rome again, even quite soon. All the same, I repeat: the sacrifice most acceptable to God is the entire abandonment of all the things of this world. And how bountiful the Lord is to those who truly want nothing other than him!

I am anxious to have you here before I leave for Trent, where I have to go to see about the beginnings of a house of ours which the Lord seems to wish to give us. So make a start on your journey as soon as possible. Do not speak to anyone without necessity about your departure: no solemn farewells; but leave very quietly, so that there is nothing to suggest that your absence will be permanent. The more quietly and discreetly you act, the better it will be. If you

wish to tell Terasconi (and the others you will greet for me), do so only when everything is arranged and you are about to leave.

When Cardinal Morozzo got to Novara he wrote to me with only a brief mention of you, but one that I found consoling - indicating that you are disposed to come as soon as I invite you.

Our good Don Giovanni and the others send their love. Goodbye. I hope you will soon console us with your presence.

Yours affectionately in Jesus and Mary,

A.R.



## 100. To Don Pietro Rigler at Trent

Domodossola, 17 March 1831

My dear friend and brother in Jesus Christ,

If the Prefect does not want to join us, no matter, my friend: there is nothing to worry about. All we want is to perfect our souls. On the other hand, put your trust solely in the Providence of God. In the beginning there is no knowing who will enter and who will not. Sometimes those who seemed the best disposed, when it comes to the point, *look back*; at the same time generosity can be found where it was least expected: *The Spirit breathes where he will*. We are only concerned about ourselves and about preserving our inward peace. So let us remain calm, thinking only about building up the dwelling of our souls. Our motto must be that saying of Ecclesiasticus: *Humble yourself before God and wait on him*.

I am glad to hear that the conferences have started again and that they are going well. It is a great help if the holy truths which form the subject of the conference are not passed over quickly or without reflection. They need to be deeply pondered in the mind, with a view to obtaining compunction and spiritual strengthening. Our great work is the continual purification of our souls: a hunger and thirst for holiness. Let us love nothing else: this is everything; in this lies the simplicity of our lives.

Please give my compliments and thanks to Mgr Sardagna, whom I have already heard highly commended by the Holy Father. Embrace Don Giulio for me in the Lord, and all the others to whom I can extend this affectionate familiarity.

Yours affectionately,

Rosmini

## 101. To Don Pietro Rigler at Trent

Domodossola. 26 March 1831

My dear friend and brother in Jesus Christ,

We must arm ourselves with the necessary patience. The Lord, in causing delays, gives us an important lesson: he teaches us to wait. And if we know how to do this in tranquillity, we know a great deal.

As for the affairs of the college<sup>27</sup>, since you are not yet *au fait* with them, let prudence guide your actions - the prudence that God will give you if you consult him over everything and act with mature judgement, doing nothing hurriedly. Haste, my dear friend, always comes not from God but from the devil! Also, take the advice of wise people.

I am glad to hear that the Bishop of Cremona, too, showed a wish to join us. Let God dispose of things. We have room amongst us for men of good will. As for giving him information: in general I would say that there is no problem about letting him have the first booklet, the *Description of the Institute considered in its essence*. You may let him have this as and when you think fit. It is a different story with regard to the second booklet, the *Description of the Institute as it may develop*. We ought to restrict ourselves as much as possible to speaking of the present, of what has actually come about. The same applies to our general rules of conduct as they are set out in the first part and in the *Maxims of Perfection*. But it does not do to talk about the future. What we take as our rule of conduct in special and contingent circumstances which have not yet presented themselves is as yet too vague, and could lead to misunderstanding. Moreover such speculation could give scope to that fantasy, that imagination, which is our spiritual enemy; which draws us away from our spirit - which is one of reason, of considerateness and of firmness in all our actions. Still, I hope that there will be no harm in giving information to someone so wise and holy. But as for things in the future, be patient, and get in touch with me before there is any question of letting him have the second book or speaking of the matters contained in it.

With regard to Stapf<sup>28</sup>: when you write to him you can give him a short description of the Institute in any way that you deem suitable, but again not going into any detail over things that belong to the future. Just describe it to him as *an association of people aiming at carrying out the teaching of the gospel* - since that in essence is what it is; the various classes of persons who enter it

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<sup>27</sup> This was the college for young students founded by Rigler, named after St Vigilio, the patron of the diocese of Trent.

<sup>28</sup> Don Ambrogio Stapf was the author of *Moral Theology*, printed at Innsbruck in 1827.

have the same end in view. Some men form associations to make money; others for amusement and recreation; others again to satisfy ambition. Ours is concerned simply with our own sanctification: nothing else. We persevere in prayer, with a common spirit; we love one another in the Lord.

Here things have so far gone along in great calm - a calm which even causes me some worry, since I would not wish it to be too great. But I think the Lord allows this because the Institute is so few in numbers, and because any considerable wind might cause it to founder. Once it has taken root, if it is God's will that it should, things will be different.

Today is the feast of our beloved Mother of Sorrows. Greet Gioseffa<sup>29</sup> for me, and her spiritual daughters too. Embrace our friends for me in the Lord. All those here with me send you their affectionate greetings.

Yours,

Rosmini

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<sup>29</sup> Gioseffa was Rosmini's sister, the foundress and superior of the Canossian house in Trent.

## 102. To Michele Parma at Valenza

Domodossola. 27 March 1831

You encourage me to turn my hand to social theory, and in this way you invite me to enter an arena which is full of passion - one in which the truth is like a lamb among wolves. Still, I can say to you sincerely and without affectation that my heart is without fear when it comes to the cause of Truth, of Religion, of Humanity: it is all one and the same cause really. And any sacrifice must appear small in relation to the one unique good which I possess: that is, the treasure hidden in a field, for which one sells all that one has. And so the passions and prejudices of men will not deter me, given God's help, from making known those principles which I believe to be the only ones which make for the health and well-being of the Church (which is the one great Society) and for mankind as a whole. Not that I trust in my own passions and prejudices: for in the last resort I can only sigh and say: if these are the prejudices which are commonly found, who will show me what mine are? All the same, our intimate convictions are always to be given weight; and those which manifest the truth to a man are so strong that there is no comparison between them and those which persuade us of error. And it is just such convictions that have been created in me, after long and patient meditation on that *philosophical theory* of which so far I have made public only the root ideas. It is my wish that this root may take; and if it does, it will show itself to be powerful, and will be fertile in a quite unexpected way. But for it to take, there will have to be powerful minds, new and noble spirits. Great study and quiet meditation are essential; and this factor makes against the prompt development of my design, because the character of our age is one of haste and impatience. All the same, I shall not slacken my efforts, and I shall keep up my hopes. It is in the order of divine Providence that I put my trust; and in those indestructible seeds that the gospel has sown in humanity - seeds which in every age bring forth new fruits from an old stock. . . flowers of a beauty unknown before, and which must be recognized as sprung from the word of Christ, cultivated with Christian love. But alas for us if because the fruit and flower are new, we fail to see that they really derive from the ancient and all-powerful plant! That would be to do dishonour to the divine root itself, and treat shamefully that treasure from which the householder *brings forth things new and old*. But it is possible, all the same, to fail to discern one flower from another, one fruit from another; and in this way to pluck fruit from the tree of knowledge which brings death, while thinking to gather fruit from the tree of life! The only way to avoid this terrible error is through humility and prayer, turning for guidance to the Father himself of truth and of life.

With cordial affection,

Yours,

A. Rosmini.

### 103. To Don Luigi Gentili in Rome

Milan. 9 May 1831

My dear brother in Jesus Christ,

I received today your letter in which you at last reply to mine of 16 March. The Lord be blessed. As for the accusation you make, I will say nothing about it: I discount it, because it is based on what is said by ill-informed people. I must rest content with the approval of the Holy Father, who is God's Vicar on earth, and without whom I have not acted in the past and will not act in the future. And in this connection, simply for your consolation, I will tell you what his Holiness was good enough to say to me in a letter which ended with these words: 'As a pledge of our fatherly [good] will, we lovingly bestow our Apostolic Blessing on you, beloved son, and on the Institute of Charity which you dedicate to us.'<sup>30</sup> After that there is no more to say. I mention this not in any spirit of boasting, but for our spiritual consolation, and so that we may give thanks to God for this.

As for the remainder of your letter, I can neither approve nor disapprove of the matter you refer to, since you keep it hidden and speak in a very mysterious fashion. I must say that it seems to me strange, all this mystery and obscurity, especially if you are sincere in giving me the title [of superior], which I unworthily bear. I will add that if I am not to find you at fault, the matter you speak of must be very important, if it is such that it causes you to put off your arrival here, since the most important thing at present is the task of forming ourselves. This is because only when we have done this shall we be able, God willing, to serve our neighbour more effectively. If we are wise, nothing should be closer to our hearts than to make a start, in a serious and regular way, on what we have proposed to ourselves. Anything that distracts us from taking this straightforward road I see as nothing other than a very great temptation of the devil. An act of charity, a request from our neighbour - these are all very well at the right time; but if someone who is called by God to enter religion, on the pretext of answering calls like these, says to his superiors: 'I do not want to make my noviciate now; instead I want to do this or that,' what must his superiors say? They will reply, 'You must do everything at the proper time.'

But as I said, I do not want to make a judgement while I am still in the dark. Rather, I want you - in fact I order you - if you regard me as your superior, to write to me about everything in detail, and that at once: not delaying for months or even weeks. This is because, if a temptation from the devil is present here, it will thus be more easily discerned, and you can more easily be helped to

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<sup>30</sup> These words come in the Brief of 9 April, a reply to Rosmini's letter of 15 February.

overcome it. For goodness' sake, my dear *Gentili*, let us not allow ourselves to be deceived: write to me at once. Your way of deferring a reply for weeks and months causes me great pain. And as for this latest affair, I cannot sufficiently understand it. Behave more openly and tell me all that is in your mind, no longer hiding anything. I need not tell you that if you do not make a start, you will get nowhere. If God really wants us to make a foundation in England, for the wonderful ends which his mercy proposes, then it means that every day you let yourself be kept in Rome causes a further delay over this foundation. I tell you plainly: unless whatever you are concealing from me is of some extraordinary nature such as I cannot conceive, you ought to flee from Rome, and do so at once, getting up (so to speak) in the middle of the night so as to hasten the moment of your arrival here - something for which you should have an intense desire. This is how the saints acted. Difficulties, secondary thoughts - these are devices of the devil to hold a man back from going ahead, and even cause him to abandon the right path. You know these things well enough; and one day both you and I will be judged over our conduct in these matters. I will say no more. I hope that a prompt and honest reply from you will fill me with consolation and entirely reassure me, removing from me all the worries which your delays, and now this obscure matter with which you excuse your failure to follow the advice I gave you in my last letter, have caused me, on account of my concern for your soul (which the devil unfortunately uses his snares to deceive, as is his way.)

Embrace Andrew Quinn for me in the Lord. If God wants to send us others, may he be blessed. I will write to you again about the affairs of Domo and Trent. Now I must close in haste. I am sure that by return of post you will wish to console me.

Yours,

A. Rosmini

## 104. To Don Giacomo Molinari at Domodossola

Rovereto, 4 June 1831

My dear Molinari,

I am very pleased to hear that you have experienced how good the Lord is towards those who put all their trust in him, and I am thankful that the retreat at the Isola went well, producing (it seems) much fruit. I hope the same will be true of the one at Gozzano. If we have no confidence in ourselves, there will always be One who will come to our help. Such diffidence about ourselves, while we are sustained always by a lively trust in God, is both right in itself and beneficial to us. May such sentiments be with us in all we do in the future. And if they are, they will cause us always to act unhurriedly, preparing ourselves as well as possible, never running risks knowingly and heedlessly - that is, without taking all possible precautions.

What particularly pleased me about your letter was the news that you have kept to our little rules, and that your resolve to become perfect in obedience has grown steadily. It is a great grace that the Lord grants us when he gives us the light to see the excellence of this virtue and the determination to practise it. You may be sure that this is the way to reach heaven, and to bring it about that everything turns out well. May my dear Molinari become a true example of obedience - someone from whom all the others can learn. I pray that the Lord may see to it that my hopes are realized, and I have confidence that he will.

I already know how pleased Mgr Scavini was with the Isola retreat, and I hope he will feel the same about the one at Gozzano. I have come here [this refers to the Capuchin house in Rovereto] in order to make an eight-day retreat for the success of the work in Trent. Join your fervent prayers with ours.

Let us love one another dearly in the Lord.

Your affectionate father in Christ,

A. Rosmini

## 105. To Don Luigi Gentili in Rome

Rovereto, 5 June 1831

My dear friend and brother in Jesus Christ, to whom be all honour and glory,

Since you speak of what the Holy Father said — the very thing he commanded you to keep quiet about — I no longer have the slightest wish that you should tell me more about the matter in question. Rather, it is my wish that you do not reveal it to me. So be in no doubt, from what I have written to you before, and now write, that I am quite without any feelings of impatience or haste. By the grace of God it is a long time since I felt anxiety or any sense of urgency over the affairs of our Society. Instead, I always submit most willingly to whatever divine wisdom judges best; for God alone knows the times and the moments, and what is opportune. I know, though, that if there is one thing the devil hates and tries to interfere with, it is a religious vocation. I know too that we shall never thrive unless we have the support of our Blessed Lady, who always takes our part. So it is natural that I should feel some fear that the devil may involve you in delays and difficulties that may well cause you to defer your consecration to God among us, and to put off your arrival to make a start on that life to which, I hope, you are called. It is because of my loving fear on your behalf that I am writing to you, and for no other reason. I am confident, too, that our Lady will help you, if you go forward with an upright intention, not looking for human gains.

I must admit, again, that it seemed to me that I detected some irresolution in you, in that you sought the advice of the Holy Father. It is not customary to have recourse to him for counsel, except in matters that are genuinely dubious and cannot be settled in the ordinary way; and such recourse is made out of the respect due to the Pope, and so as not to expose oneself to temptation. If I really thought this was an obstacle originating from the devil, I would write to the Pope asking him to be good enough to exempt you from the obligation of secrecy. For the saints tell us that the devil makes great play with secrets of this kind, but is soon overcome when a man begins to speak openly. But since I am not wholly convinced that this is the case, I will do nothing for the present and wait for you to write to me — as soon as you can. I am all the more persuaded to adopt this course since it occurs to me that the matter in question may be on the credit side (I have been given some indication that this may be so). In the meanwhile, then, let us pray and be vigilant, so that we are not deceived. For the rest, go ahead with an upright intention; and I do not want my words to upset or distress you.

Here, thank God, things are going well. Molinari was invited for the first time to give a retreat in the seminary of S. Giulio d'Orta at Gozzano, and I am told that he did this very well. The Lord be praised.



I saw Mr Phillips in Milan, and he told me all about the shady stratagems practised by some people against our Society, and about what has been said. My dear friend, I find in this a fresh reason for not making known our Constitutions easily and without good reason. So I must adjure you once again to say nothing (in the time before you leave) about our affairs without necessity. ... The more we say, the more material the devil will have at his disposal in order to work behind our backs. What we must do is not talk but act: let people see our works; mere words have no force except to give rise to self-esteem in ourselves and suspicion in others (who do not understand things properly). And out of these doubts come the rumours, the condemnations, which arouse in people's imaginations the empty speculations associated with human passions. And so, my dear Gentili, great prudence and circumspection, please. Let us go ahead with simplicity, and remain small as we are; we must not admit many into our confidence or go after great people, for it is our place to be humble.

For the rest, I was very taken with that good man, Phillips. In the short time we were together we struck up a holy friendship which I hope will be lasting. He opened his heart to me and told me about his plans. May the Lord carry them out! In Milan also I introduced him to one of our close friends, and the two of them were very glad to get to know one another.

I am writing to you from a house of quiet retirement, to which I came for a few days of recollection and prayer to the Lord, before going on to where I have been invited. You already know what this is to do with. Pray for me, and (as I said) write to me as soon as you can. We have to account to God for every day that passes.

Yours very affectionately,

A.R.

## 106. To Don Luigi Gentili in Rome

Trent, 1 July 1831

My dear friend and brother in Jesus Christ,

Your last letter caused me great pain: I see from it that you let yourself be ruled by your imagination. What illusions and deceptions you have fallen into! You say that just when you were about to leave as a result of my call, you were held back by your desire to do a pious work. [This was to found a house of the Institute in Rome to look after 'juvenile delinquents'.] But however pious this work may be, it was not one which you could carry out while you had the call to begin to form yourself in the Institute of Charity. If this is your vocation, then this is the one pious work that at present is incumbent upon you. The rest is an illusion that distracts you from your proper aim. If someone wants to make a journey, but allows every small byway to draw him from his route out of a desire to see where it leads, he will never arrive at his destination. I find in you a lack of seriousness, and (I fear) a facile presumption, in that you let yourself be attracted to works that are not for you at this stage that is, if you have a vocation to the Institute of Charity.

Did not the Cardinal Vicar give you leave to depart? So why are you still there? You say that you felt an *inspiration* to act like this. Well, what I want from you is fewer inspirations and more firmness, and especially more obedience. I am very displeased by the way you let yourself be guided by your fancies, paying heed to goodness knows how many interior voices, all of which distract you from getting yourself to where your vocation summons you and your superior invites you. You give me much cause for fear. You ask me to pray to God so that he may give you a little humility, since you feel you have none. My answer is that I am very willing to do so, for you seem to be greatly in need of this virtue. You speak as if you were a man inspired — you must think highly of yourself! You speak of doing heroic things, and say that you have decided to come here like a pilgrim, on foot, *without staff or purse*. My dear man, mere words do not satisfy me: I look at the facts. And the facts are that you have not come, and that you have built up all sorts of castles in the air, and committed a mass of imprudences. You jumble up so many things in your letter, introduce the names of so many people, that I hardly know where to begin to show you your faults. So I will content myself with saying that your talking about our affairs, your blowing the trumpet on my behalf... it is all totally against the spirit of our Institute — which prefers to remain hidden, humble and content within itself.

I have been written to you from as far away as Florence about what has taken place in Rome — from which I understand that you have filled the city with your idle talk. You speak of persecutions, yet you can hardly do other than invite persecutions if you talk so imprudently. Would people talk about or oppose something of no substance, something that scarcely exists as yet? You

must not suppose that every persecution is for the sake of justice: there are persecutions that men bring on themselves by imprudence. And it was a particularly enormous imprudence, your asking an audience of the Holy Father so as to resolve your doubts. These were only the product of a heated imagination, together with a lack of docility and Christian simplicity. If you have a vocation to the Institute of Charity, and its superior tells you that it is time for you to come, is this not the plain road before you? If you want to abandon this road, it is tantamount to not wanting ever to reach its destination. I had to write to you, because this audience you asked of the Pope, without any directive from me, and concerning which you try to excuse yourself in triumphalist language instead of admitting your fault — all this greatly displeases me. I feel I can no longer recognize you as mine if you do not acknowledge how inconsiderately you have acted.

What temerity, what presumption on your part — to do all these things without first asking my advice. And why, if you were in doubts about coming, did you not write directly to me and ask my opinion, rather than have recourse to the Pope? If you had done so you would have saved yourself from committing so many imprudences. But perhaps you were afraid that I would have given you advice that would have gone against your desires, and so you wished to be 'protected' by the words of the Pope, so that you could do what you pleased? Oh, any such way of behaving should be far from us. Only simplicity can enter our houses; anyone who is devious, let him stay away. It was because of the Pope's great goodness and his kindness towards me that he treated you so gently; but I will let him know, if necessary, that I had no part in your action, and that it grieves me very greatly that you abused his kindness; further, that unless you reform yourself I shall no longer recognize you as one of ours. This Institute of ours does not advance through manoeuvres of this kind: indeed it would no longer exist if it tolerated such things within itself.

You add also that you asked audience *several times of the Holy Father, from the moment he took office, to congratulate him in the name of our Society*. Who gave you this commission? Who made you our ambassador? It was nothing but your imagination which put such ideas into your head — to the point where you made yourself the representative to the Pope of a Society which you have not even consulted, from which you received no authorization. How many blunders there are here! Consider how they humiliate me: think of the fine reputation you create in Rome, for me and for the poor Institute, pretending to be an ambassador plenipotentiary! But God's will be done. I have brought these things on myself by my sins.

Let me speak plainly to you. I will not accept any more excuses, but I want you to admit your faults. Moreover I enjoin you, if you have not been deceiving me up to now and if it is true that you have a vocation to the Institute of Charity, *to set off immediately for Domodossola* — not on foot (since you have not the strength for that, and it would be tempting God), but comfortably, by carriage.

I am fairly certain that the Cardinal Vicar will give you leave to depart, knowing that I wish this, for he is very well disposed towards me. I must tell you clearly that if you disobey me again this time on the pretext of some other inspiration or some other mysterious business, I shall conclude that you have not been chosen by God to be one of our number. Here we are in the habit of acting quite differently, and the Lord in his mercy leads us safely in everything. At present we are far from being in a position to accept the proposed foundation in Rome — it is a mere will O' the wisp. Instead we must consolidate the two foundations already made, and give no thought to spreading ourselves until we have struck root and completed our formation.

I await your reply, and from this I shall be able to see what the Institute can expect from you. Goodbye, and may God and our Lady bless you.

Yours,

A.R.

# 107. To Giuseppe Rosmini Serbati<sup>31</sup> in Rovereto

Trent, mid-July 1831

My dear brother,

I am genuinely sorry about your troubles, and they make me weep for you before God. But the truth is that you have brought them on yourself, through wanting to act on your own and through lack of trust. Oh, if only you would listen to other people's views and not be guided solely by your own reasonings! If only you will humble yourself sincerely before God, and before other people too, you will find relief. Be more open: be trusting. What do we gain by being so afraid of letting others know about our anxieties and troubles? If we examine ourselves, we shall find that this comes of a certain *amour-propre*. Through not wishing to cut a poor figure, we actually show up worse. My dear brother, there can be nothing more consoling than being humbled for the love of God and on account of our sins. Those who are simple of heart, who accept humiliation, are in fact fortunate. Jesus Christ was humiliated, and he is our model: he was called foolish by his enemies. Having an excessive love for our own reputation is a snare: it betrays us. What we must seek is not the praise of men but the approval of God, gained through acting with prudence and honesty. And we shall never act prudently if we do not trust other people, if we do not listen to their views, and even prefer them to our own. It is through conferring with others that we learn good sense and avoid falling into grave errors through trusting too much to our own reasoning. Declare war on every kind of singularity and on all eccentricity. Even as regards your domestic affairs, do not act as you have hitherto done, pursuing simply your own plans. These have no practical value: what you need is to follow the suggestions of others. Can you not see for yourself that your affairs are going badly? So why do you continue to trust in yourself, and indeed ruin yourself through having so many doubts, instead of abandoning yourself into the arms of a brother who loves you dearly, and who wants — and has always wanted — nothing but your happiness? Can you imagine that I am seeking my own interests, that I wish to deceive you? What a dreadful mistake this would be. But enough: I pray that God may enlighten you; and this I have done fervently this very morning and yesterday at Mass — asking God to grant you true humility of heart. It is only if we are cast down that we shall be exalted and all our actions will receive God's blessing. This is what I want for you from my heart.

Goodbye. I embrace you warmly.

Your affectionate brother,

Antonio

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<sup>31</sup> This letter is to be found in manuscript form, undated; but it must have been written around mid-July 1831. (Ct. E.C. Letter 1471). Something can be learnt about the strange character of Giuseppe, and the distress which Antonio suffered on his account from the *Vita di Antonio Rosmini*, vol. I, pp. 244-248.

## 108. To Don Luigi Gentili in Rome

Trent, 20 July 1831

My dear brother...

I thank the Lord with all my heart. Your letter has greatly consoled me. The excuse you made over wanting to go to see the Pope is not valid; for the example set by all those who have recourse to him is not one we should follow. Our interests differ greatly from those of worldly men: they have good reason to visit sovereigns and people of high position, but such reasons have no weight with us. Nor is it true that the Pope would have taken it amiss had you not approached him, precisely because he is so good and has a lofty understanding. What I mean is that he would sooner have admired your humble and modest reserve, and been reassured that such behaviour showed that we have no interested motives. Also anyone who thinks nothing of himself does not even believe that others are watching him: he stands back and is content to be passed over. I did not even pluck up the courage to write to the Pope when he took office: I preferred to seem stupid rather than bold. And I only wrote when the Holy Father took the initiative and was good enough to send his regards to me. Then, moved by the outstanding kindness of the Pope, who showed that he remembered me even when he was raised to so lofty a position, I felt constrained to write to him. And he was kind enough to send me a most gracious reply.

But the excuse you put forward, even though it was invalid, I can regard with indulgence, because of the reason you give for making it — that is, not to exculpate yourself but to dissuade me from making any approach to the Pope (not that I would do so without necessity). For the rest, I am very pleased by what you say, viz. that you wish to recognize your faults with sincere humility, all excuses set aside. This is the right way to take, and God will fill you with his blessings if you so act, as I greatly hope you will. If we wish to amend our faults, there is no better way (when we receive correction) than to see things through the eyes of whoever gives the correction, and to look hard so as to see our defects in all their deformity. God then gives us the grace, that priceless grace, to see them as they are, and so to be in a position to put them right. Given such a disposition, my dear friend, you need have no fears of failing the test in the cloister; rather, you must put your trust in God and in Mary our Mother, and believe that you will certainly win the victory and find a holy retirement far sweeter than you ever imagined. And then you will also be able to consider what your next step should be, and you will no longer act unthinkingly, because obedience will put a brake on your imagination. But do not suppose that you will meet with any severity: for you will gain constancy and steadiness in working for souls and helping them — as opposed to the grandiose but empty schemes with which, alas, the devil tries to seduce us.

The thing is to go steady: *age quod agis* ['get on with the job']. When we have our minds fixed on doing one thing, nothing else will have the power to distract us from attending to it. Now the work we have taken in hand is that of striking roots and forming ourselves according to the spirit of the Institute. Once (with divine help) we are formed and incorporated into the Institute, then through obedience we shall be able to work fruitfully, since what obedience gives us to do is the will of God. And — who knows? — God may bring about a foundation in England (something we have discussed with Mr Phillips). Or perhaps one of us may be called by God, in his own good time, to Rome itself? As for all these 'who knows?', let us leave matters in God's mind. We are not curious to delve into his secrets; we are content in the knowledge that all his designs are most merciful. So we cut ourselves off entirely from any thoughts of the future, knowing that we cannot be sure of even a single day of life. Let us all concentrate on the present: in this we serve God; here is our peace; here is all our happiness.

This is what it means to go steadily, to do what obedience enjoins on us; to do it with total love, with complete abandonment into the arms of God and those of our dear Mother, Mary. What blessed security is to be found in this way of living wholly in the present in this beloved abandonment of ourselves into God's hands! May the devil not lead us to imagine that only perfect souls are required. What a wretch I should be if this were the case — I should have been sent far away from here. No, we are here for no other reason than to amend ourselves: this is the great work that God wants of us all. Courage, then! *Let our loins be girt*: get yourself on the right road at once. I should never finish if I were to include in this letter the affectionate greetings of all your brethren, who join with me in embracing you in the Lord. Give my greetings to dear Barola — I have heard from him and shall be replying. May Jesus and Mary bless you.

A.R.

## 109. To Don Giacomo Molinari at Domodossola

Trent, 29 July 1831

My dear brother. . .

I was greatly pained to hear of the illness of Don Giambattista [Loewenbruck]. But it was God's will that this should happen, and so we can only bless him. I more or less foresaw [this illness], and was worried about him. But I hope this sickness will be of short duration. Send me frequent and detailed news of him, I beg you. And tell dear Don Giovanni that I charge him expressly to use every care so that, God willing, he will soon be better. I put you in charge in my place as regards his health, and he must obey you exactly in the matter... Also, even when he has recovered from his sudden illness you must see to it that he avoids everything that would tire him; especially he must not undertake the work of the confessional, and he must not get up too early of a morning. Be careful to see that he obeys you in these things (as I have said) as if he were obeying me. Further, take care that during Don Giovanni's indisposition exact observance of the Rules is maintained. In his absence I want you to lead by both word and example; and I want the others, too, to be faithful to religious observance, so that all may be of one heart and one soul as you advance in the way of the Lord — which is that of obedience, mortification, recollection, and fidelity to our Rules...

I trust that I shall soon have consoling news of Don Giovanni. . . Here things are going very well. All the brethren send their warm greetings to those of you at the Sacro Monte, and I too embrace you in the Lord.

In haste: your affectionate brother and superior,

A.R.



## 110. To Don Giacomo Molinari at Domodossola

Trent, 6 August 1831

My dear brother. . .

Thank you for the consoling news of dear Don Giambattista. I should like to see an end to the fever which still afflicts him; but I hope in the Lord that this will soon pass. If he is unable to write to me himself, you must not let the post leave at any time without sending me news of him.

As regards the subjects of the conferences: I give Don Giovanni leave to put forward whatever he deems best adapted to the needs of the brethren. For the rest, I earnestly wish you to impress in the depths of your soul the three instructions that form the *Memorial of the First Probation*, and not to take them so lightly. I am afraid that you do not really take them sufficiently to heart. Do meditate on them seriously, dwell on them, ask God for light on them. For unless you do this you will not understand more than the external shell, so to speak: you will never manage to savour their vital and nourishing power.

For the rest, I give Don Giovanni permission to change the subject matter of the general community conferences if he thinks fit — but on condition that you hold one weekly conference among yourselves (that is, among those who are members of the Institute) on those instructions, in an ordered fashion; and I earnestly beg you all to receive in depth what they contain, and to render it efficacious in your lives. In each conference I want you to treat those instructions with great fidelity, taking them as they are written, almost word by word, after diligently reflecting on them.

As for the spiritual coldness which you experience, I urge you from my heart to put it to flight and to do your best to become fervent and full of zeal for the spiritual exercises prescribed by the house and by the Rules. Examine yourself carefully so as to discover the cause of this slackening of zeal that you feel. It probably comes of not being exact enough in fulfilling the things prescribed, and a lack of mortification, especially of the will — which is the most important kind; though I recommend you also to use physical mortifications, particularly over eating.

As regards Don Giovanni and his illness: treat him with all the charity you would use towards Jesus Christ; and when he is well again, yield him the most scrupulous obedience and total respect in everything — because to give this practical submission to your superior, as if he were Christ, is greatly effective in obtaining from God the grace of holy fervour and recollection. Since I am anxious that you should not slacken your efforts, I charge you also to write to me, telling me what you have found by means of the particular examen you have made to discover the causes which may have contributed to making you

spiritually cold; you are to tell me in detail about your present state, so that I may know how to help you (as I wish to do), relying on the grace of Jesus Christ. Pray specifically with a view to obtaining from God true and solid virtues, especially those which are most called for by our holy vocation.

I thank God for the good news about Flecchia, and I embrace him warmly in the Lord. I also urge on him as emphatically as I can that he must study.

Gentili is coming by way of Genoa to Calvario; it may even be that he has left Rome already, but I have no precise information about this.

Things are going very well here, thank God. Your brethren here and I too embrace all of you at Calvario. Goodbye.

Your affectionate brother in Christ and your father,

A.R.

### **111. To the Bishop of Trent**

Trent, 18 August 1831

My Lord,

Since it seems that we have to fear that the scourge of cholera may well reach our district, and that, if so, the ravages of the disease are likely to reduce greatly the number of those who look after the poor when they are sick, the undersigned priests offer themselves to your Lordship, declaring that they are ready to minister to the spiritual and temporal needs of the sick in any way that you may see fit to employ them. At the same time they ask that you do not spare them in any way, since they trust in the Lord's help, and are ready to give their lives out of love for their neighbour in his great need.

Asking your Lordship's blessing...

Antonio Rosmini Serbati

(The signatures of the others follow)

## 112. To Don Antonio Vittadini, parish priest of Besate

Trent, 19 August 1831

My dear Vittadini,

[Rosmini first sympathizes with the afflictions Don Vittadini has suffered, exhorting him to live by faith; and then he goes on:]

In the other part of your letter you say you feel some urging towards a religious vocation, but mention certain obstacles, such as your weak stomach, of which you have spoken to me before. My reply is that we have no rule which calls for a strong stomach! Those who belong to our little Institute are subject to the various ills that the rest of men suffer from. Work and age do not spare our health: we are not exempt from their effects; and the Institute, which has for its essential end simply our personal sanctification, of its nature is ready to accept both the old and the infirm (unless the superiors, for the sake of greater good, on occasion decide against admitting them.) Among us there are no fixed rules governing the food and so on that are necessary, except those of the first Christians who, after putting everything in the common fund, then distributed their goods (as we read in the Acts of the Apostles) according to the needs of each. One thing to notice is that as regards corporal and other needs, no one is judge in his own case, not even the superior (who is assigned someone who decides for him). Everything is regulated by obedience. So it can happen sometimes that an individual may suffer — but then who does not have something to suffer in this world? In any case, such a situation will rarely occur within a Society in which nothing is regarded as more important than kindness towards others. This is what charity means, and it is the name of the Institute. A more common occurrence is that men who are spiritually fervent would take too little thought for themselves unless the superior made provision for them; and this is the main reason why everyone is assigned someone who will look after his health and his various needs.

Lastly it is essential that anyone who gives himself to God should abandon himself to divine Providence, and be disposed to be content with what is sufficient. *Habentes alimenta et quibus tegamur, his contenti sumus*. [If we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content.]

For the rest, commend the whole matter to God in humble and generous prayer, asking only for his glory and your own salvation, and he will hear you. And include in your prayer also —

Your friend,

Antonio Rosmini

### 113. To Don G.B. Loewenbruck at Domodossola

Rovereto, 20 August 1831

My dear brother, friend and father in the Lord,

I give thanks over the improvement in your health — but you must continue to take care until you have fully recovered. I am writing just before I leave for Calvario, where I hope to have the consolation of arriving within a few days, and so I will keep this brief.

Yes, get Isaia and Pietro to see to the woodshed and the new refectory, if you think this is a good idea. I am afraid the refectory will turn out to be very damp, but use your own judgement. Persuade Molinari (in my name too) that there is really no need for cocoa on Sundays, and that this would be the sort of superfluity that should not be found amongst us. Because one of his defects is a tendency to gluttony, I leave it to you to give him some sort of penance in this line for a few days — for instance to take dry bread without coffee of a morning. But use all charity towards him, and support him in this weakness, if at present he is not able to take any strong admonition. But do not lose sight of his fault, since we want (with God's help) to extirpate it altogether. We need some bodily mortification: poor people, such as we ought to be, have to be quite content with dry bread for breakfast. If we make things easier, and have broth or coffee, this must cause us some disquiet; and it should not be at the expense of at least our wish to be mortified. When I arrive I will talk warmly about these things to our friend Molinari, and I am sure he will listen to me. In the meantime, may God help him — and all of us — to overcome our defects. Pray for me and for all here, where things are going well, thanks be to God. Soon I shall be able to say to you in person what I cannot put in a letter. One of ours will be coming with me [he is referring to Giulio Todeschi], so have a room ready for him. Greet everyone in the Lord for me by name — those within the house and those working outside it. Goodbye.

Your affectionate brother and son,

Rosmini

## 114. To the Vicar General, Mgr Scavini, at Novara

Domodossola, 4 September 1831

Very Reverend Monsignor,

I am writing to you from Calvario . . . where I returned a few days ago, after my visit to Trent. I hope you will be able to see things for yourself, so I will say no more about the situation there, except that God has brought about more than I would ever have dreamed of, as he so often does. May he be blessed and glorified in all his workings.

As for the letter you kindly wrote to me while I was in the Tyrol, I was delighted with that part in which you spoke of our basic rule, and of your resolution that it must ever remain in the book, and even more in our hearts. [Rosmini goes on to speak of his profound desire for what he calls 'justice' — it is really holiness.] ... Oh, if God would only grant me the grace to be less of a wretch than I am! He knows that I want nothing else [than holiness], and I ask for it day and night: this is the sum total of my desires. And if we are sincere about this I would like us to add in due course a few other rules to the two already written, which may help us to carry out better the one fundamental rule which includes within itself all others. But when that time comes, you will let me know; and if the Lord gives me the pleasure of speaking with you, we will discuss this.<sup>32</sup>

It also greatly consoled me to read in your letter of the opinion the Cardinal is forming about the Constitutions; but I would not want him to be too fearful: if God wishes this work to succeed, it will succeed — and it will last. For what has been done so far has indeed been his work. I feel this in my heart, knowing that I have done nothing myself. What God may be pleased to do in the future it is not for us to speculate about; but we must not put any obstacle in his way through lack of trust; we must act both prudently and with confidence. If we do this we shall be content with what God may be pleased to bring about from day to day, and we shall not incur blame because through our lack of faith we have hindered his merciful design.

What I need to obtain from his Eminence is a formal approval of the Constitutions: this is all I seek; and I would hope to receive it, because if he considers the work a good one he will have no objection to expressing his views in a formal way. What do you think? Dare I hope for this? I am impelled to wish for such an outcome since Pius VIII, on his own initiative, gave me an express

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<sup>32</sup> Mgr Scavini not only was willing that Rosmini should act as spiritual director of Giuseppe Lissandrini and Celestino Teruggi (who were priests of the diocese of Novara), but in addition he himself drew profit from the instructions that Rosmini gave to his students, and applied them to himself.

command to have the Constitutions examined and approved by Cardinal Morozzo, and then to forward the matter to Rome. And this command has been endorsed by the present Holy Father.

I recommend myself warmly to your prayers, and sign myself, with respect and gratitude —

A. Rosmini

## 115. To Don Francesco Boscetti at Intra

Domodossola, 5 September 1831

... I was greatly consoled to know from your letter that your health, thank God, is improving, and I pray that you may soon be sufficiently recovered to allow you to cheer with your presence those companions of yours whom you have at Calvario, and who keep you always in mind.<sup>33</sup> You say that you are listless in your enforced leisure, though I can hardly believe this. But if it is as you say, my answer would be that you should make every possible effort to advance in the science of sciences — the one which alone can make a man happy and content. I can wish you nothing better than that you may become a man of prayer: in this is truly found *omnis homo* [all that matters for man]. You will be blessed if you learn at whatever cost to become one! And it is prayer itself that will teach you how to become a man of prayer — or rather our God and Saviour whom you invoke in prayer will do this. And in this holy exercise, keep me too in your thoughts, wretched and poor that I am. So too, have your friends and brothers here at Calvario in mind before the Lord, made one in holy prayer. Goodbye. I embrace you affectionately in the Lord.

Yours,

Rosmini

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<sup>33</sup> Don Francesco Boscetti, a nephew of Mgr Scavini, had gone to Calvario on 30 December 1830 in order to complete his course in moral theology. (Cf. E.C., letters 1322 and 1339.)



## 116. To Mr Ambrose Phillips at Garendon Park, England

Domodossola, 6 September 1831

[In this long letter Rosmini first speaks of spiritual things, encouraging Mr Phillips to seek perfection, and reminding him that in view of his social standing he was in a position to do much good for the salvation of souls in England — which, he says, was once 'an island of saints'. He speaks of his own grief over the separation of England from the Catholic Church. ]

[He then goes on:]... To come now to our own little Society [the Institute of Charity]: I do not know if you are aware that its fundamental aim is the sanctification of the souls of its members, who help one another to achieve this. Hence, of its nature, it admits to membership those who (like yourself) are placed by divine Providence in the world rather than in religious life, yet greatly desire spiritual perfection... The Institute allows such people (who are in the world but do not share the principles of the world) to be associated with its members, (those who take religious vows), calling them *ascribed*, and seeing them as closely joined in charity, and sharing with the religious in the carrying out of good works. They are truly members of the Institute and co-operate with it for the glory of God and the good of their neighbour in any way that Providence seems to want. I tell you these things for your information, and perhaps for your consolation — should God move you to wish to share in this way in the work of our small Society, which takes as its principle: 'to do whatever makes for the glory of God and the love of our neighbour, in any country, provided we are invited to do so; and to be entirely content to do this.'

As for our means of subsistence in England, God knows what is necessary, Have no worries about this, since our needs are very small, and even if no help were available we should still come if the Bishop wanted this. We would live on our own means as long as these lasted, and after that trust to Providence. No one of those who work for God ever died of hunger. The Lord has ample means to maintain those whom he alone calls and directs to work in his field.

I am very grateful to you for your zeal over such a work [in England], and only God knows what good may come of it for his honour and glory there. I thank you too for what you have said to your Bishop, and for what you intend to say to the good Earl of Shrewsbury. I have no doubt that the foundation for the work you envisage will be laid. So that you may know how things are with us here, let me say that Gentili is with me at Calvario, and I have one or two others whom I am preparing for work in England as and when the Lord pleases. There is nothing that is dearer to my heart than this. I shall send with this letter one from Gentili, so that you may know his sentiments and be consoled by them. God is clearly giving his blessing to our affairs.

We have now made a new foundation at Trent, the city where the last ecumenical council was held (the one which opposed modern heresies), and I am sure that it is not without significance that divine Providence has called us here, where the Bishop wished to have us. Things are going very well, thank God. I have received other invitations, but I do not want to expand overmuch, and prefer to proceed according to the advice given to me by the Holy Father, Gregory XVI. It is very fitting that he should send us to England, since he shares his name with Gregory the Great, who converted England to the faith. On our side, I hope that we shall be ready in less than two years. Now is the time for us to pray hard and to make all ready — you on your side, we on ours. . . and apart from our private prayers, we also pray in community in our houses for you, my dear Mr Phillips, and for your holy plans and desires over England, asking that God may bless them all, according to his holy will, in which we rest tranquil. And when I speak of your 'holy desires' I have in mind first of all the well-being of the souls that are so dear to you — that is, the health of your father and of your family.

The troubles which afflict England and the world will certainly make for the good and triumph of the Church; and I too, my dear Mr Phillips, look to see new and previously unknown glories accrue to the Church of Jesus Christ, in fulfilment of all that the prophets of old foretold — for this is as yet incomplete. The glory of Jesus Christ yet to come is such that it must surpass all human thought and the desires of the saints; though I do not dare to apply the 'thousand years' spoken of in the Apocalypse, which you quote. The Lord knows all things: he knows the 'times and the moments'; and as Job put it, *he brings hidden things into the light*. For our part, let us hold fast to his holy and adorable law. In this we find all that matters. Above all, let us pray. You are remembered as I say Mass each morning; and my intention takes in our project, together with everything else regarding the glory of God and our little Society. I will send you a description of this, and you may at your discretion show it to one or two others. May Jesus and Mary bless you. (I am writing during the novena for the feast of the birth of our heavenly Mother.)

Goodbye. I sign myself, as I am in Jesus and Mary,

Yours,

Rosmini

## 117. To Mgr Grasser, Bishop of Verona

Trent, 5 November 1831

Very Reverend Monsignor,

... Permit me now to write to you what I was unable to say to you (because of the shortness of my stay in Verona on my recent visit) concerning the objection made with regard to the excessive number of works which the Institute of Charity, in the shape in which I envisage it, seems to propose to take on. As I have already said, this objection rests on a mistaken idea; but I was unable in my reply to explain the matter. The false notion is this: that the Institute proposes to take on all works of charity indiscriminately. This is untrue. It takes on only one single work specifically; and left to itself it has no other in view. This work is the sanctification of the members who make up the Institute. In this it differs greatly from the Society of Jesus, which has two main aims: the sanctification both of its members and of other people. The end of our Institute is simpler, being restricted to the first and principal one of self-sanctification. Hence it is an institute which is radically contemplative, leading a quiet and private life such as befits simple priests or any lay person who aspires to the perfection of the gospel. It is a mistake which is unfortunately common nowadays to believe that the office of a priest of its nature involves the care of souls; whereas it is the bishop alone who is by nature a pastor. Priests have no other mission apart from that of praying and offering sacrifice for themselves and for the people, unless the Bishop should call them and give them a mandate. So it is proper that both the layperson and the simple priest should lead a humble life, hidden and obedient, given to prayer and study. This kind of virtue, then, this manner of life, is the scope of an institute like ours, made up of private persons, joined together with the aim of sanctifying themselves (and helping to sanctify one another) through the duties belonging to their state. The choice of this (rather than any other aim) was not an arbitrary decision of mine, since it is an aim that no one can put aside, being established not by me but by God; so that to add to this the undertaking of a particular work of charity would require a special mission, a special manifestation of the will of God, an extraordinary inspiration. Such things are undoubtedly to be found among the saints, but not by a wretched sinner like myself. And if God does send extraordinary vocations even to sinners, he has not done so to me.

It is true however that we cannot tie God's hands; and that even those laypeople and those priests who first take thought for their own souls, invoking as their motto the words of the apostle, *attende tibi* [attend to yourself. Cf. 1 Tim 4, 16] may be called by God to exercise some work of charity — and this not simply in some extraordinary manner, but in the ordinary course of things. This is because, generally speaking, all are obliged to exercise charity towards their neighbour, and much more those who aim at the perfection of the gospel. It is clear, then, that whenever our neighbour asks our help and we are able to

give it, then it is a matter of obligation, or at least of counsel, that we should do so. In this way Christians as such are drawn by a *moral necessity* to do works of charity in certain cases; and this applies much more to priests and to those who aspire to perfection. For in such cases, to refuse would not make for the sanctification which they take as the only object of their desire. On the other hand, no one is obliged and I would dare to say that no one is even advised (in the absence of some special vocation) to go about searching for the needs of his neighbour; because the neighbour we ought to help is represented in the gospel not by a sick person who has been sought out, but by the case of the Samaritan who encountered one on the road. And Jesus Christ himself lived a hidden life for thirty years, in order to teach us a lesson against false zeal. Even when he began his public ministry, he confined himself to carrying out the mission he had been given; he did not seek out the sick in order to heal them; rather they were brought to him. So much so that it called for much insistence on the part of the Canaanite woman to be heard — faced as she was by his saying, *I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*. (Mt 15, 24). It follows that when they are faced with a request from their neighbour, even private individual Christians who have no special mission are certainly obliged or counselled to give their help; in such cases the will of God — and hence the 'mission' — is evident. Now, these are the works of charity which the Institute of Charity undertakes to accept, because it could not possibly refuse them, by the very nature of its one simple aim.

You may well answer that, precisely because these works of charity are of no specific nature, this means taking on all and every one. But my comment on that is that no one can issue laws to Providence, to whom alone it belongs to determine what works of charity each of us is called upon to exercise. We may not, by an arbitrary decision, rule out a good work which by force of circumstances we are obliged or counselled to take on. It is enough if we take on works of charity prudently. This is the situation of all Christians and of all priests; and who authorizes us to tie God's hands or set limits to the gospel? Is it not the very nature of charity to be universal? Can I arbitrarily propose to myself to exercise charity only by halves — yes, in some cases, no in others? If in fact it was Providence that employed me in some particular work, certainly I am dispensed from taking on another which would be beyond my powers. But as for making for myself a rule not to go beyond certain specified works of charity, well, I do not know how I could so act without setting limits to the law of the gospel — or in other words, rewriting the gospel for myself. And even less could I contemplate imposing such limits and restrictions upon others.

Does this mean that I am condemning other religious orders? Certainly not. God forbid that I should do so. Rather it means that I am saying that the holy founders of the religious orders were granted great supernatural illumination, given an extraordinary mission; and in saying this I intend to give the highest praise to those religious institutes. So too I have not the slightest doubt that the holy Marchesa di Canossa was given a special divine inspiration to found the Sons of Charity in the way that she did; for I have the greatest esteem for

her, and I have no difficulty in believing this — particularly since she had a similar extraordinary inspiration to found the Daughters of Charity, which is clearly a work of God. But my wretched state is infinitely distant from such things, and I can only take the most ordinary and common ways (and God knows how imperfectly I do even this). Were it not for the goodness of my companions, the Institute of Charity would not be making such progress both in the diocese of Novara and in this. Indeed it would not even be in existence.

So our state, and that of laypeople, and that of secular priests, is the same. And the obligation we are under, all of us, is to take on the works of charity offered to us by divine Providence, *with prudence*. But when it comes to proceeding prudently, there is a considerable gain in being a congregation as against being simply individuals. For with us, no one is a judge in his own case; rather he is guided by the judgement of his superior, and he is given tasks only when his superior has decided that these are to be seen as obedience to the will of God, which is made known by external circumstances. Another notable advantage of being a united body is that we are able to help one another and to prepare ourselves better in order to carry out with generosity of heart what is pleasing to God, and not simply something that our own caprice suggests, or something in accord with our inclinations, under the pretext of holy zeal. And yet a third advantage is that, God willing, a body of people can carry out charitable works on a larger scale than could private individuals.

And a propos of external works of charity, I recall what you said to me about the difficulty of knowing how to regulate the conduct of a body of people living outside religious houses. But here it is well to recognize that the houses represent the real basis of the Society; and that those who live outside them are a sort of extra force: people who are able to help in certain works — works such that if 'internal' religious were employed in them, spiritual dangers might arise for them. The Society could continue to exist without these external helpers; but to have the faculty of calling on extra help is no bad thing. This is all the more the case since charity requires that if someone external to the Society wishes to have a share in its good works, he ought not to be excluded. Indeed to exclude such a one would be the sort of arbitrary principle that I have always set my face against, whatever the circumstances. It follows then that the external helpers are a consequence of the spirit of the Society.

I beg you, Monsignor, to forgive me for writing at such length; and as ever I ask for your blessing.

I remain yours very sincerely.

A.R.

## 118. To Don G.B. Loewenbruck at Domodossola

Trent, 13 November 1831

[In the first part of this long letter Rosmini severely reprimands Loewenbruck for having made a journey to Turin, absenting himself from Calvario (where he was in charge) while Rosmini himself was away, and this for no apparent reason. This action of Loewenbruck, says Rosmini, produced various ill effects: Gentili, who was in the formation stage, was both heavily burdened and left without the guidance he needed — and moreover took it upon himself to write to Cardinal Morozzo without his superior's permission. All these things were quite contrary to the spirit of the Institute, says Rosmini, and he is greatly disturbed by them. He orders Loewenbruck to inform him fully of what lies behind it all. He then goes on:]

. .. But the thing that most afflicts me is the air of triumph with which you tell me about the kindness shown to you by M. and Mme de Lascarène, and about their having spoken to the King about the Institute. I am greatly displeased both by the vanity you show and by the importance you attach to obtaining worldly support. Are you not yet persuaded that our work can only come from God, and can only be sustained in and by him? How little you as yet understand the spirit that must animate us! I can tell you that I weep over this even as I write.

You say that you did not *directly* move the minister to write to the King: so you did so indirectly! What an illusion, what self-deceit is here. It grieves me to see you, who ought to proceed steadily, uprightly, with trust in God, instead act in the spirit of the world, with its deceit, its craftiness, its disingenuousness. When will you ever understand me? Certainly you have not done so up to now. You are far from the right road. You will have to render an account before God of what you have done, and of the harm you have caused to our Society; for the way you have acted is the way not to establish it, but to destroy it. I shudder at the thought. On the one hand to profess to live a hidden, private life, and on the other to try to cultivate the acquaintance of ministers and kings — this is to lie to God. It is a deplorable blindness: in trying to deceive God you deceive only yourself. Oh, do not flatter yourself on achieving brilliant momentary successes which are in reality sad failures, fatal to our Institute — which should not desire anything but to remain unknown, especially by those in high position. God forbid that the devil deceived you to the point perhaps of getting you to go to Turin with this in view. What were you thinking about, that you failed to write to me beforehand about such a journey? What did your instructions require of you? The first of them was this: 'Whenever you have to make a decision, first (unless the matter is urgent) write to me and wait for my reply.' Did you read these instructions, and did you meditate on them as you ought to have done? I fear you may not have taken care to do either. It

certainly seems as though you had no scruples over disobeying them. Yet, my dear brother, by doing this you will look in vain for God's blessing. Tell me: if I had been at Calvario, would you perhaps not even have had the courage to put to me your proposal of a visit to Turin? Otherwise, why did you not tell me about your plan, why did you not speak to me about it before I left? Examine yourself, so as to see whether perhaps you had not been planning this trip from far back, but awaited the moment when you could elude the vigilance of your superior. Is this how you treat me? If so, then it means that you do not wish to act loyally and with an upright intention. Examine yourself further to see whether perhaps in your heart of hearts you knew beforehand that I would have disapproved of your going, and yet you went. You know how it was only with much circumspection and reluctance that I let you leave Calvario while I was there. And did you not know how much more importance I attached to your being present there while I was away? So does it not pain you to think that on your shoulders alone must fall the blame before God for the evil that may have ensued and for the good that may have been lessened as a result of your absence from the house? Did I not make myself clear? Was not this one of the points I made to you before I left for Arona? And if it was not enough to tell you this by word of mouth, did I not leave it to you in writing? Read the list, and you will find these words: 'because it is essential that all these activities should be carried on resolutely and carefully, it follows that you should absent yourself from the house as little as possible.' My dear man, it scares me that you take no account of the instructions of your superior. You leave aside the virtues of obedience and loyalty and uprightness, and instead go off seeking the protection of the world. No good will be achieved like this: God will not be with us unless we change our ways. We may gain the whole world, but to what small profit; and God will treat us like the wicked and unfaithful servant in the gospel.

I want you to consider very seriously all these things and to enter into yourself; to change your rejoicing into sadness and repentance; to make solid resolutions to show more wisdom and prudence before the Lord.

You then tell me briefly that Baiocchi has left Calvario, but you do not tell me why or how! Here too you make a mystery and do not treat me as you should. Did he await your return before going, or did he leave before then? And if it was while you were away, as seems likely, perhaps this too was a fault due to your absence?

In brief, then, your letter made me very sad, because I see that you have committed many faults. I see great negligence in your obedience and in your failing to follow my instructions: I see a sort of levity in your thinking, and it is clear that you have not made progress in maturity and consideration. Your letter leaves me in the dark about everything: it is written without due respect,

without love and without candour. God give me patience — he is punishing me for my sins. .. [Rosmini goes on to impose several strict commands on Loewenbruck, calling on him to examine his conscience, amend his behaviour, and suggest a suitable penance. He then concludes:]

I hope that by God's mercy I shall receive from you by way of reply a letter that will console me for the last one you wrote. I say goodbye in the Lord, asking you to embrace for me everyone in the house.

Your much afflicted superior,

Rosmini



## 119. To Don Luigi Gentili at Domodossola

Trent, 14 November 1831

My dear brother in Jesus Christ. . .

I shall not be able in this letter to reply to all the points in yours (as I should like to) for lack of time; but I will in due course deal with everything. So be patient for the present and accept what I can manage... Remember that patience and knowing how to wait are both highly important for us, and that I am the enemy of haste. What is extremely dear to me — and what I should like to see all our members practise — is the virtue which is called 'longanimity', and which is so much praised in scripture. Here then are the few observations I have for you now.

I am pleased that the novices are being given meditations suitable to their needs, and I am sure that we shall be rewarded for this. What I particularly recommend to you is never to make the slightest show of authority when dealing with them, but rather to treat them with gentleness and unceasing charity, putting up with their defects with longanimity and patience, not trying to make them run faster than they can manage, but simply guiding them step by step up the ladder of virtue. When we know ourselves, we shall show great kindness to others, making every allowance for them. And whatever progress there is to show, let us thank the Lord for it; for this too is his gift, and does not come from man. When we notice defects, it is often wise to pass them over, when we judge that to correct them and impose penances would be too much for the moral strength of a novice. A better opportunity will come in time, and then we can seize it and administer the correction. It is highly important to realize that only very rarely does it happen that a correction given on the actual occasion of a fault is helpful. For the most part it is better to leave the erring individual tranquil and at peace; and while he is in this state, and least expects it, then get him to listen to the voice of reason and sincere love (*I say to you not seven times but seventy-seven times. . .*), and pardon the fault. So you must not be anxious over, not even recall to mind or feel any rancour about, the faults of the novices; gain control over yourself, and give no sign that you are put out or offended by anything they do, and not hold in your mind anything against them. Otherwise you will lose their confidence and their love; and without these you will accomplish nothing, however hard you try. Think about the description which the Constitutions give of the Master of Novices, and remember that the principal quality required in him is this: *Hic autem vir sit natura pacificus* [He must by nature be a man of peace].

I must close, because there are people coming. I bless you and embrace you tenderly in the Lord. Abide by the instructions you receive, and maintain perfect union in the house by using kindness, charity and humility, and by submission to your superior there. Talk with him as often as opportunity allows

— this will be very helpful. Goodbye, then: I shall be expecting a faithful account of everything in due time.

Your loving brother in Jesus and Mary,

R.

## 120. To Don G.B. Loewenbruck at Domodossola

Trent, 27 November 1831

My dear brother and friend in Jesus Christ,

Forgive me if I caused you suffering by my last letter: it is a great consolation to me to have to ask your pardon for the pain I gave you — though it was in large measure unintended. In fact if you will re-read my letter calmly you will see that the reproofs I made were always in terms of *I am afraid that, I fear that, if you were to blame*, and so on. And this was because they were conditional; so that if the conditions were not met, they did not apply. So do not think that I was passing judgement on your conduct, my dear brother; it was simply that *I feared...* and the appearances gave me good reason to fear. So if you think I was wrong to tell you about *my doubts over* your conduct, not only do I humbly ask your pardon, but I willingly submit myself to accept any penance that you impose on me, and to satisfy you in any way you choose.

With that as preliminary, I would ask you to allow for the fact that my position was very trying — not having received a single letter for over a fortnight from Calvario, despite the fact that both you and Gentili were obliged to write to me, according to the instructions I had given you. Moreover I had myself written twice in the meantime. Reflect too that if your need to leave Calvario was *most urgent*, as you tell me it was, such that a single day's delay could have seen a military occupation of the house... you could still have got Gentili to write to me straight away, telling me all the circumstances, rather than wait to write to me yourself from Turin, when the whole affair was over.<sup>34</sup> Probably your idea was to tell me about the happy ending of the matter without previously informing me of the danger the house was in. But, my friend, I do not want you to use that sort of delicacy or consideration; I prefer to be told about everything that happens moment by moment, whether the news is good or bad. I am not sure that I would have advised you to go to Turin, even given the urgency that you point to; so I still cannot approve of your going, because I still do not know the details. *But perhaps I would even have preferred to expose myself to the danger of a military occupation of the house, rather than betake myself as far as Turin and avert the occupation by means of seeking a detestable privilege —*

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<sup>34</sup> A little light is shed on this mysterious incident by a passage in the *Vita di Antonio Rosmini* (Vol. 1, pp.383-4). It seems that Rosmini himself had heard rumours of some possible threat to the old religious foundation in Domodossola which he had leased from Count Mellerio, but upon consulting the Cardinal (who had considerable influence with the government) he was reassured that there was no cause for alarm. But apparently in his absence, Loewenbruck either heard further menacing rumours or (perhaps more likely) was led by his vivid imagination to see the house bursting with armed soldiers; and he had no peace of mind until he had taken the step which so disturbed Rosmini: his journey to Turin to seek reassurance for himself from a minister of the King.

*something that generally speaking is quite contrary to the spirit of our Institute.* I do not know whether this reflection really comes home to you, though I should certainly like you to feel its force. For the rest, it is necessary for you to throw more light on the matter, and I want you to tell me just what reasons there were to fear a sudden military occupation.

You then say that you do not see what harm there can be in the King's knowing about and approving of our Society at Calvario. My dear man, whether this is good or bad only God knows. But the point is that our community is of its nature *humble, private and hidden*, and if it goes looking for the approval of great men without necessity, it is playing false to its spirit, which is one of confidence in God alone and in his sublime Providence... so we can only approach those in high place when there is a moral duty to do so. It follows that if we had sought such approval it would have been a mistaken move, taking us off our right track. So *either* you agree with me that we should not, directly or indirectly, depend on worldly influence (and should rely purely on God while we are carrying out our duties) — in which case what I said does not apply to you *or* you still entertain the inclination to go ahead and intercede with men of position to gain their protection. If this is the case, you can correct your false zeal and, with God's help, put matters right; and there will then be no cause to have doubts about your vocation.

All in all then, my dear brother, take in good part and understand properly the things I said to you. Do you not yet know me? Do you not realize that I want only what is good? Indeed, by God's mercy, I want nothing else. So you must realize that what I say to you is meant for good, not harm; not to afflict you or discourage you, but to lead you nearer to perfection, so that you can then show the way to others, those entrusted to you by the Lord — to whom you will have to render an account. So, as scripture says, *serve the Lord with a perfect and sincere heart*.

Greet Molinari warmly from me, and tell him I want him to do well in every way, as I am sure he will. And get him to write to me sometimes, not standing on ceremony but simply telling me about himself and how things are with him, speaking candidly and openly.

Let us love one another in the Lord, my dear brother. I embrace all the brethren: greet each one of them from me by name. I have in mind to write to you again, telling you why I fear it was imprudent to go to Turin, even given the urgency you felt. But first I am waiting to hear what reasons you had to fear an impending occupation of the house by the military. Goodbye for the present then. Let us always pray to the Lord.

Yours affectionately,

R.

## 121. To Don Luigi Gentili at Domodossola

Trent, 29 November 1831

My dear friend and brother in the Lord's service,

... Practise humility, too, by being submissive to your superior, depending on him in all things and maintaining a perfect accord. In this way you will gain great merit; and while your own soul will profit by so doing, your labours with the novices and your companions will also be the more blessed. It is from God's blessing that we can hope to receive everything that is good — not from human exertions.

It is good to impose penances in proportion to the spiritual strength of the recipient, and to be rather more severe with those who are more perfect. Even a small defect deserves a not inconsiderable penance; but everything must be regulated with an eye to the profit which can be expected; this profit is the whole aim of the great art of looking after souls. So be indefatigable in your care to see the novices make progress, but adapt their spiritual food and drink to their stomachs! The grace of the Holy Spirit will inspire you how to deal with individual souls, and you must continually ask this of him.

I am delighted to hear of your progress in philosophical studies, and I have great hopes of the outcome of these; the consequences for the glory of God are more than can be foreseen.

Goodbye again. Pray for your poor brother,

R.

## 122. To Mr Ambrose Phillips at Garendon Park in England

Trent, 9 December 1831

My dear friend and brother in Jesus Christ. . .

Your letter took nearly a month to arrive here in Trent, where I have come to help in setting up this new house, which the Lord has so far been pleased to bless, sending us the companions who I hope will accomplish much good, with God's help. I tell you this so that you too can give thanks to the Lord. . . and because I look on you as one of ours.

I have left dear Gentili at Calvario, where he is making good progress, thank God, in virtue and perfection, and is preparing himself for the work you have so close to your heart, and which seems preordained by divine Providence. He was made aware, by the newspaper reports, of the trials which England is undergoing just now. The hand of God is present here, leading things forward to the end which you touch on — the glory and spread of the holy Church, the Bride of Christ.

It will be very surprising if here too we do not have to cope with cholera. We already expect it, and preparations have been made. As for me and my companions, we have offered our services to the Bishop, should the disease break out, so that we may give both practical and spiritual help to the sick; and if we were in England, we should be happy to do the same, provided always that the bishop of the district wanted this. We try to satisfy the wishes of the local bishop in everything, wherever we are, with the help of God, and as far as our small abilities allow.

It was very welcome news that you gave me of the conversion of Lord Stuart and Lord Northesk, and I thank the Lord from my heart. I pray for your father and sister daily, as do our brethren both here and at Calvario. So too we pray for the conversion of England, and for the mission which it would seem that God is preparing to go forward. With regard to this, I was glad to hear that Lord Shrewsbury kindly received the news you gave him of our Society. As for the fact that he has not offered to contribute funds for establishing it in England, think nothing of it; first, because, since we are poor men, we are content with little, and a life of poverty is suitable for us; again, it may be that the noble Lord wishes to wait until the possibility of realizing such a thing is nearer to hand. But, as I say, we are not concerned about temporal goods: nature requires little enough; and for a while we shall be able to support ourselves with what we have, provided only that we have a house to live in. So all that is needed is the agreement of the bishop of the place, whom we mainly aim to serve, wherever he may be pleased to employ us. So it was good to know that your pastor, Mgr

Walsh, approves of our project.<sup>35</sup> I will send you the whole plan of the Society (that is, the *Descrizione*), which I will have translated into English, together with the Statutes (which are in Latin), so that you can read them as and when God prompts you, and then, according to the dictates of prudence, submit them to the Monsignor, or to anyone else, as you think fit. Once we have found a house and come to an understanding with the local prelate, there is nothing left except to go to Rome, to the feet of the Holy Father, Gregory XVI, and receive his blessing and the mission to take ourselves off to England. Meanwhile we must pray fervently to the Lord and to his holy Mother, so that everything that God has planned from all eternity for his greater glory and our perfection, and that of all the souls redeemed by him, may come to maturity.

As for Mr Quinn: I had a letter from him recently. He is not too well, and will not be able in the near future to join the English mission. Circumstances will probably dictate that, for a time at least, he will have to go to Ireland. But Gentili will not be without a companion — I already have one in mind.

Should you know of a good young Englishman who knows Latin and perhaps has thoughts of becoming a religious, it would be well if you could send him to me. Once he arrived I would make myself entirely responsible for his maintenance and his theological studies. So the only outlay required would be for his journey here — and I say here because at Trent I would have all the means to facilitate his studies, better than at Calvario. I mention the matter not because I want you to seek out such a young man, but just in case divine Providence should send one to you.

I will also send you the Rules of the Ascribed; and if in the meantime you wish to become one, I do not think that the views of Fr Glover need present any obstacle, because the Holy Father is fully informed about us, and he was good enough to give his approval verbally, and also to bless the Institute in a Brief he was so kind as to send me. The present Pope was in fact the one with whom, while he was still a Cardinal, I planned everything — and from whom I received encouragement to go ahead. Even without this, the approval of your bishop would, as you say, be enough; and this is why I believe you need have no fear concerning the words in the little book of the *Maxims of Christian Perfection* — which are directed at those who, not out of the love of God but out of vanity and arrogance take it upon themselves to presume to do great things in the service of the Church. On the contrary, anyone who is moved solely by the love of God is inspired by the Holy Spirit, as is said towards the end of the booklet; and Nos 21-24 teach the rules that are to be observed so that we are not deceived by our own spirit. Certainly we need to be continually purifying our intentions, so that nothing merely human comes into our affairs, but rather that everything we do may be genuinely in and for God; so that we wish for

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<sup>35</sup> Mgr Walsh was the Vicar Apostolic of the Midland District, and Garendon was within his jurisdiction.

nothing in all circumstances except the will of God. . . we are to be moved only by what the love of God suggests; and we are to work, too, with a holy magnanimity and liberty of conscience, basing ourselves always on the holy law and the life-giving word of Jesus Christ. And since I know that it is precisely this that you want and seek for, even as regards your state, this consoles me greatly and makes me believe that God will enlighten you and make you holy — which is what we pray for continually; and your prayers for us have a similar scope, for we are one in spirit, and so are like the separate grains which, when ground, are mixed together and go to form one sole loaf; like grapes from the one vine, from which the wine is made when the separate grapes are blended together. This is how we want to be, and will be always, my dear Phillips, and completely so in eternity.

I recall that in your last letter you spoke of having in mind the holy humility of our Saviour: concerning this you could read what St Theresa has to say in chapter 22 of her Life. Now, my dear Phillips, my brother in Jesus Christ, I embrace you and bring this letter to an end, since I have no more time. I will send your letter on to dear Gentili, and he will write to you from Monte Calvario. Goodbye.

Yours affectionately,

Rosmini p.



### 123. To Don G.B. Loewenbruck at Domodossola

Trent. 13 December 1831

My dear friend and brother. . .

As regards having the novices make their confessions to you or delegating them to Gentili, the only consideration must be their greater profit. It is up to you to act in the matter as, before God, seems to you most to their spiritual advantage. If you decide to leave their confessions to Gentili, see that it is to you that they make their manifestation of conscience every two months (or more often if you think this wise in some cases). You are their superior and father; as such, do what you judge best (taking only this into consideration); I only counsel you first to weigh matters in God's sight.

You say that Gentili does not *want* to hear confessions except on Saturdays or Sundays. You must not be swayed by his wishes in the matter but solely by what you judge best before God. The important thing is to take off his shoulders every burden that gets in the way of his attending to the needs of the novices. But if these duties are compatible with hearing their confessions, and this is not beyond his strength, then leave it to him.

As for Molinari: I would not wish to have him hearing the confessions of women so soon, unless on a particular occasion when there was some urgency, and where this would not interfere with his carrying out well his other duties — this I would permit.

When I return I may be able to bring you a confessor who will lighten the heavy burden you carry.

My dear brother, love sincerely what humiliates you, and when you receive humiliation, do not fall into discouragement. To be humiliated is really a grace, and to be discouraged by it is a sign of lack of trust in God. I beg you to act calmly: believe me, to take decisions hastily, and to act precipitately on them, is not to behave according to the spirit of God but simply to be guided by our own spirit. Let us make war against our vanity; and from now on make your particular examen on the subject of charity, *which is never jealous, is never boastful or conceited*. God bless you; all here embrace you in the Lord, as do I.

Yours entirely,

Rosmini p.

## 124. To Count Giacomo Mellerio in Milan

Trent. 13 December 1831

My very dear friend,

Things are going very well here, thank God, without human influences favourable or unfavourable — which are both to be feared. The Lord is at work increasing our numbers, and (in spite of the obstacle that my sins present) our virtue too.

I had a letter from Phillips on the usual theme. What an admirable spirit that man has! He seems to be the sort of Catholic that Bartoli describes in England. He tells me of the conversion of the Earl of Northesk and Viscount Stuart, as well as of the progress of religion in that country. Mr Quinn also wrote to me: he is thinking about doing good in Ireland. The Lord will dispose things as he wills: may he ever be praised. I want nothing but his will: *Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides thee.* It is a great happiness to be dedicated to the service of God; and this is true of all of us and of all things. When this is so, we are at peace; we feel that what we are leaning on is stable and immovable. When it is not, then we experience only divided affections, uncertainties, disquiet. Rather, may it be true of all of us that we are dedicated to that same most happy service! We must want this, and it is then for God to perfect us in this desire.

I have good news too from Calvario. My sister thanks you for your greetings and respectfully salutes you and your sister — as do I. Remember me to Castelbarco, Padulli and the others. Continue to love me in the Lord, and send me news of yourself and our friends.

Antonio Rosmini p.

## 125. To Emilio Belisy<sup>36</sup> at Domodossola

Trent. Feast of St John the Evangelist. 1831

My dear Belisy,

I was very pleased to receive a few lines from you; every time you send me a letter giving me detailed news of yourself you do me a great favour. I thank God, who is helping you to carry out your holy resolution, and I pray daily for you, as for all our brethren. The path of virtue is certainly an arduous one, but grace makes it smooth and plain. We must put all our trust in this truth, and then at the end of this road we shall find all good, all glory. Oh, you cannot be deceived in feeling yourself happy if you persevere in the service of the Lord! How good he is to those who serve him with simplicity and constancy; how he always outdoes us in generosity and in bestowing his gifts! So make yourself his, more and more fully day by day; hold yourself and the world in low esteem. My wish for you, greater each day, is that you may grow in love of heaven, love of poverty, and the practice of obedience and mortification. I embrace you warmly and I bless you from my heart. Goodbye.

Yours affectionately,

A.R.

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<sup>36</sup> Emilio Belisy, from Carpentras in the diocese of Avignon, was one of the first men sent by Rosmini to initiate the Institute in England.

## 126. To Don G.B. Pagani, Spiritual Director of the Seminary of Novara

Trent, 27 December 1831

My dear Director,

Your letter greatly consoled me. What a precious thing it is to be totally dedicated to the service of God! May he daily increase the light by which he makes you know the happiness of this service. Let us be at one in praying for this with all our heart.

I am not sure whether your letter means that you feel yourself called to the religious life in general or whether you have your eye particularly on the Society of Calvario, as some passages would suggest. If this is indeed the case, then the difficulty raised by the Father you mention would not seem to me insuperable. As regards Mgr Scavini, should you truly have decided on this course (and only if this is so: for if your decision is as yet uncertain, it would be better to take your time about it), I would advise you to tell him candidly of your desire. I am sure that he would listen to you gladly; the Monsignor is very well disposed towards us at Calvario, and he well understands the nature of a religious vocation and the consecration of oneself to God. As regards the post you hold in the seminary, one would have to find out what the Monsignor felt about this: he might well be able to shed light on the situation and open up the way. In short, then, I can see no harm in putting yourself in his hands over the way in which you can fulfil the will of God as it is made known to you. You may like to know that the Superior of our Society holds in this diocese precisely the same post as yourself — i.e. he is the Spiritual Director of the Seminary of Trent. Originally he was the Rector, but after joining us he resigned this post and took on the duties of Spiritual Director. He now carries out very well all his various duties, as the man of God and highly capable fellow that he is. I tell you this simply to show you that in our Society obedience regulates everything.

Above all, pray much, and respond with a ready and generous heart to all the good inspirations you receive. It is through pouring out humble prayer that we gain the power to do always the more perfect thing. Let us set no limits to the divine mercy and purify our intentions; let God alone be the object of our hearts, the motive of all we do. And let us banish all merely human judgements and earthly motives. Pray for me too. Oh, how good the Lord is! here he sheds his blessings prodigally on our little Society; so much so that I am continually approached by priests — some of the finest in the diocese — seeking admission. So that now our number is quite considerable, and the quality of the brethren excellent (myself alone excepted, since I am the only flawed one). I warmly embrace you in the Lord.

Cordially yours,

A. Rosmini

## 127. To Don Luigi Gentili at Domodossola

Trent, the Feast of St John the Evangelist, 1831

My dear friend in the Lord...

Have no doubts — the Lord will bless your labours; just make it your constant aim to be patient, and to set aside your own judgement for the love of God. I can see that you are upset; but none the less you must suffer until God inspires your superior to ease your burden. These are the times when we acquire merit by faithfully practising obedience. Do not think it is a small matter to hear with patience and charity the confessions of the simple folk whom Jesus Christ loved so much. And do not harbour the thought that there was no need to leave Rome just to do this, as the devil tries to suggest to you. Be obedient up there at Calvario, and this will count for more than anything else. Besides this, you are making war on yourself, and this has an incalculable value in God's sight. And lastly, you cannot know either the way you will have to follow in future or where God means to lead you. To keep yourself in patience and wait on the Lord is a continuing course of study of far greater value than poring over books. So devote all your efforts as well as you can to this; and where you fail, be humbled and say: 'All is well: this is the Lord's will, let him see to everything.' Do not worry then, or be anxious; be content simply to explain the situation to your superiors, and then rejoice inwardly over the divine will. I have already written to the Vice-Superior, telling him what I think.

I am glad to hear that the noviciate will soon be wholly in accordance with the rules laid down. See to it that it is a model for our future noviciates to follow. This is something I greatly desire.

As regards Alvazzi: it seems to me that there is a fund of generosity in that soul, but that he needs to be formed and trained. Go about this gently and yet with such firmness as the Lord may suggest to you. Greet him from me and encourage him to make progress. Tell him that I want to see him, and hope to find when I come that he has made great strides.

Thank God, everything here is going very well, and you will hear from the Vice-Superior, to whom I have sent news. I must finish now as I have much to do. All the brethren greet you. Goodbye.

Yours,

Antonio Rosmini

## 128. To Don G.B. Loewenbruck at Domodossola

Trent, the feast of St John the Evangelist, 1831

My dear friend and brother in Jesus Christ,

As regards leaving the house when you have to go on journeys, arrange things with Gentili, whom I should like you to hold in perfect charity. And when you write to me about him I want you to be careful to paint things in their true and kindly colours, so that what you say is inspired only by the truth and the desire for God's glory. I say this not because I think you act otherwise, but because it is always beneficial for us to examine ourselves over certain small passions which can easily infiltrate into us and remain hidden. Forgive me if I continue to treat you with my usual freedom: this is my duty; and it also accords with my desire to see you attain perfection. (At the same time, believe me, I sincerely want you to do as much for me.) What leads me to give you that advice is the presence in your letters of certain expressions in which you seem to lay upon Gentili various faults. For example you say: 'he is very keen to hear the confessions of those within the house'<sup>37</sup>, and so on. To which I replied: 'Do not pay attention to what he wants, but be concerned only for the glory of God.' You soon showed him my answer, so as to reinforce your position; and in this way you provoked him to write to me saying that his wish to be exempted from the duties of the confessional arose only from the pressure of his other duties, and that he was very willing to submit his request to obedience. And I hope to God that he is sincere in what he says. So it would have been more prudent on your part not to have shown him my reply, but instead to have recollected yourself in the presence of God to discover what made for his greater glory. You could then have listened to any considerations that he brought before your mind, and hence come to a decision without fear or favour. So make it your aim to be a reconciler of hearts, and to see that no slightest shadow of conflict comes to be amongst us — for we are united in God, whom alone we seek, never ourselves.

Here, thank God, things are going well — to the point where they exceed my hopes. It would take too long to tell you everything, so I will say simply that our numbers are growing; and, what is more, we have some excellent subjects. Only

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<sup>37</sup> What Loewenbruck has in mind (though it is not actually said) is that he found Gentili happy enough to hear the confessions of those within the community ('those within the house'), but not at all keen to hear confessions in the church attached. The main reason for this disinclination was that he already had a great deal to do in connection with his responsibilities for the novices, and confessions in the church were very numerous and time-consuming. A subsidiary reason may well have been that many of the local people who came for confession spoke a sort of dialect that Gentili found difficult to understand (though Loewenbruck, with his much broader experience, did not have this difficulty).

yesterday I received a formal request from the new Rector of the seminary. He was one of the best parish priests of the diocese before being called to take charge of the seminary, and he is a young man. Now the seminary is run by us, since the Rector, the Spiritual Director (Rigler) and the Prefect are all members of our Society. Besides that, we have two professors of theology. On Christmas Eve I received two new men; and if I had room to put them up, several others are ready to enter.

Thank God from your heart that he is so good to us, despite our ingratitude for his gifts. When spring comes I must get busy over building. Then I should like you to come here and stay for a week or so. Tell me when would be most convenient, and arrange things so that your absence occasions no harm. I end by embracing you warmly in Jesus Christ.

Yours,

Rosmini

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