

A selection from
THE ASCETICAL LETTERS
OF
ANTONIO ROSMINI

Volume III
1837-1840

Translated and edited
by John Morris Inst. Ch.

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TRANSLATOR'S FOREWORD

Generally speaking I have followed the same policy in this translation as in the previous volumes, where I tried to explain my approach in the Forewords.

A number of things struck me forcibly as I worked through the letters of 1837-1840. One was the way in which Rosmini clearly spent just as much time and care in writing with advice to a laybrother or a novice as he did when he was addressing a Cardinal or a Pope.

His intense interest in individuals comes out again and again; and he constantly asks humbly for the prayers of his correspondents. His humility comes out again when he pleads that his name should be omitted from the Brief giving approval of the Institute of Charity. (d. Letter 93).

His views on poverty in the Institute address a message to our consciences! (d. Letter 117). And it is interesting to read the note in the *Epistolario Ascetico* on Letter 602 (no. 100 in this volume), when it came to appointing a Superior of the Sisters of Providence: 'Sister Giovanna Antonietti was the first Superior of the new central house in Domodossola, by the unanimous vote of her companions, who loved and respected her as a mother, *and with the kindly consent of Rosmini.*' (my italics).

Not to lengthen this introduction unduly, I will mention only one other feature which struck me: the frequency with which Rosmini urges on his brethren that they should act not childishly but in a *manly* fashion! Magnanimous himself (in the true sense of the word), he wished all members of the Society of Charity to be so, always *generous* (a favourite word of his, along with 'gentle') with both God and neighbour- above all, of course, in giving love.

J.F.M.

1. To Don Giacomo Molinari at Domodossola

Turin, 24 January 1837

My dear brother in Jesus Christ,

The temptation that is troubling you seems to me no more than a fly which you fear will swallow you up in one mouthful! Chase it away with your hand. You know that the most gentle dispositions of divine Providence are such as to produce remote effects using secondary causes. This is why God wished to convert the world to the gospel by means of the apostles, and now daily makes the vivifying light of his word shine forth through the ministry of those he sends. Why look further? If you put your hopes in him, he will bless your words. You are a secondary cause; and secondary causes have to serve and co-operate with the primary cause, which is why St Paul calls those who proclaim the gospel *co-workers with Christ*. So do all you can through prayer, study, diligence and so on, and do not think beyond this. What need is there to speculate about the outcome? What we need to think about is *our own duties*. This alone should be the object of your thoughts; and in this you must find peace. Leave the rest to God. I embrace you in Christ and bless you all.

Yours, ROSMINI p.

2. To Count Antonio Fedrigotti at Rovereto

Turin, 6 February 1837

My dear cousin,

If ever there is a moment in which those who are related by blood or friendship experience the need to make their feelings known to one another and share the sentiments of their hearts, it is surely that of some great grief. And such is the case between us now, my dear cousin, over my feelings for you and for all your family at the sudden and bitter loss of your elder brother, *Giuseppe*. The news I have just received pierces my heart, and makes me imagine, through my own sorrow, what must now be the desolation felt by yourself, your mother, the widow, and your other brother.

My dear Antonio, how unsearchable are the designs of the Almighty, and how inscrutable his decrees! Here was a person so dear, so good, so charitable — one who was the delight of his family and everyone in the town, who did so much good by his example and his actions — yet he has been taken away from us while still young by a grave and mysterious malady; and the fatal outcome could not be avoided despite the prayers, tears and pleas of so many sorrowing relatives.

And yet everything which comes from God is to be adored, for even in those terrible moments when he applies the lash to us he is good, he is just, he is holy! So let us yield to nature our tears, when it demands them, as our involuntary tribute; but let us then prostrate ourselves before the God who disposes of all things, and who is ever not only omnipotent but also all-wise and all-good; and let us offer him our humbled and contrite hearts as a holocaust; let us offer him ourselves completely, adore his will, bless him in all that he does, and never fail to kiss the hand that strikes us, yes, but out of love. He is our Father, and he acts only for the good of his children. He takes us to himself, or he lets us continue to live, according to his knowledge of whether the one or the other is the more beneficial for the eternal salvation of our souls. And so we must have a firm hope and belief that if God has taken from us our dear *Giuseppe*, it is because he knew very well, in his infinite wisdom, that this was the best moment for him: the moment in which he was ready for heaven; and that there would have been no gain in allowing him any longer to be exposed to the temptations and dangers of this present life.

Oh, who can ever be sure of not falling, during this so very transient life? And what a great grace it is that God grants to chosen souls when he rewards them with eternal life, foreseeing that were he to let them live longer, then either this might be dangerous or it would not lead to such a great harvest of merit for the future life? But only God can make this judgement; and we must hold it as certain, through our faith in his limitless bounty, that when he makes this decision he does it especially for the sake of privileged and elect souls, one of

whom, we firmly hold, was Giuseppe. I have for a long time seen him growing greatly in goodness and piety; and when I now recollect the long discussions he had with me whenever we were alone, it warms my heart still, remembering those talks of the things of God and matters of conscience (and he had a most delicate and refined conscience). He ever showed a complete disillusionment with and detachment from the things of this world, seeing them as passing fantasies. The thought of death was familiar to him: he often spoke of it, and was ever preparing himself for it, having a presentiment that he had not long to live.

All these thoughts greatly console me in the grief I feel when I think of him; and they give me a profound hope that for him death has been a true mercy shown him by the God who wished to reward him and assure this beloved soul of heaven. I say nothing of his acts of charity: I am sure that they will be for him a harvest gathered in heaven and repaid to him with interest. All the same, we must pray for his soul, since human weakness is great, and the slightest blemish is enough to delay glory for us. So I at once celebrated Mass for him, prayed for him and got others to do so.

For the rest, my dear cousin, may this great affliction be of profit for our own souls. We must persuade ourselves that this world is not our homeland, but only a road we have to travel; a place of testing and of struggle in order to win the crown of life. We have not come to this earthly city to enjoy, but to merit. If we keep this thought before our minds, as did Giuseppe (especially in recent years), we shall live ever prepared for the great journey; we shall never be deluded by false and fleeting goods. Our gaze will be on the eternity for which we are destined; our whole attention and endeavour will be to do as much good as we can, putting all our trust in God alone. And if we live like this, how happy our death will be! It will be the most beautiful moment of our whole life.

Give my profound condolences to all your family. May the Lord comfort you, strengthen you and bless you all. Goodbye.

Your most affectionate cousin,

A. R.

3. To the Sister of Providence Maria Teresa at Chieri

Turin, 9 February 1837

My dear daughter in Christ,

I thank *God* for his goodness in restoring you to health. But still avail yourself of the dispensation over meat, particularly those of you who are not obliged to fast; and pay attention to *what your confessor tells you over this*: you cannot go wrong if you do so. Love one another; put up with one another's defects; try to foster in the souls of the little girls the holy love of *God*, and to educate them in the love of *Jesus Christ* who has redeemed them. Do this and you will win heaven. Be quite certain of this.

I do not know when I shall be able to come to see you. In the meanwhile, pray for me, and be of good heart in the Lord. Goodbye.

Your father in Christ,

A. ROSMINI

4. To Mgr C. E. Sardagna, Bishop of Cremona

Turin, 9 February 1837

Very Reverend Monsignor,

If I were a saint to whom God revealed his will in a face-to-face conversation, I would not hesitate for a moment to say: 'Monsignor, do this, do that, *says the Lord*. But I am only a poor wretched man who has to act according to the indications of the limited prudence that the Lord has granted him. And according to these indications it seems to me that I must not interfere, I must not even say a word, over the question: would it be a good plan for Monsignor to choose a house of the Institute or some other place? Nothing will induce me to pronounce about this choice. You must consult yourself, you must pray to God - who never denies his light to those who have recourse to him. After that you must deliberate, and then let me know your decision. You must know simply that if God inspires you to come to one of our houses, then not only will I accept you, but I will do so with open arms. I will receive you as my great patron; I will take it as a favour, an honour. These are merely my personal feelings, and they must not influence your choice. You wish to come to a decision quickly, and I too hope to know soon what your decision is, so that, if the case arises, I may have suitable accommodation prepared.

You must not be offended by my firm conviction in the matter. Rather, I would ask you to understand my inability to give you advice. Were it otherwise, as you assume in your letter, then be sure that I would want to use my ability for the benefit of someone who is so dear to me, whom I respect so much — as I do you in my heart. So, I repeat, you must trust in the Holy Spirit, and then you will surely be consoled.

Meanwhile, there is no reason to doubt that your renunciation of the episcopacy will meet with acceptance by His Holiness too. I hope that the Holy Father will realize, from the reply you sent to Cardinal Odescalchi, how firm you are in your resolution, and so will the sooner grant you the Rescript you desire.

Please convey my warm greetings to dear Paoli, and give me your blessing. With every token of respect,

A. ROSMINI p.

5. To Don Carlo Aliprandi¹ at Rovereto

Turin, 13 February 1837

My dear friend in Christ,

Console yourself that there is no spiritual battle that Jesus Christ has not won — and will win within us. So the ravages that self-love cause you will be put right by the grace of Christ, provided that you put all your trust in him: *for you are my rock and my refuge*. There can be no doubt that it is a grace merely to recognize these faults for what they are and admit them (as you do in your letter). What you must do is to go on opposing act to act — voluntary act to involuntary act; resistance to temptation; recourse to God against the fraudulent seductions of the evil one (whom we daily ask God to protect us against before we kiss the altar). And what of the Virgin Mary, the Queen of humility and every other virtue — do we fail to appeal to her? Shall we fear we may not overcome temptation while we fight under her banner? So let us remain calm and feel secure: with our weapons always in our hands, we need nothing more. We shall be comforted when we least expect it: we shall not only obtain victory but feel the joy of overcoming; for our God is good — so good! *Great is the goodness of the Lord: greatly is he to be praised*.

In your welcome letter you say nothing about your vocation: it rather seems to me that you are settled in your present state and have no thoughts of changing it. Is that really so? I should like to know directly what your intentions are, for my guidance — in other words, so that I may either look for ways of profiting by any occasions which divine Providence may offer me in the future, or put aside any such thought.

Give my warmest regards to Gasperini² and all those who ask about me. I do not know whether you have received the *Life* of Felice Moschini written by Don Francesco³. Goodbye.

Yours affectionately in Jesus,

A. R. p.

¹ Don Carlo Aliprandi of Verona had come to Rovereto as chaplain and co-worker with the Archpriest of San Marco. He died there in 1837 after the cholera epidemic had come to an end, worn out by his exertions in helping those struck down by the disease.

² Don Antonio Gasperini.

³ Don Francesco Puecher.

6. To Don Antonio Rey at Prior Park

Turin, 11 March 1837

My dear Father and brother in Christ,

I am sure you will forgive my delay in replying to your letter of 25 November. Do not let my tardiness stop you from writing to me, because your letters always give me great pleasure.

Now to come to what we are most concerned about — the spiritual trials you are facing: do not suppose, my dear Rey, that you are alone in being up against the enemy. Alas, poor me! If I could let you know my own situation, it would perhaps bring home to you the gist of the verse: *It is a comfort to the wretched to find that they have companions [sc. similarly troubled]*. But I do not think there is any point in telling you about my problems. Rather, let us both find comfort in considering (1) that our prayer in which we plead for charity, humility, self-denial and the other virtues, cannot be disregarded, because Jesus Christ has promised [that it will be noted and heard]. And so: faith, prayer, perseverance: Jesus has won the victory for us; (2) that even the prayers of sinners made in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ are heard, since the goodness of him who listens to them is INFINITE. So we must open our hearts to receive consolation. I believe it would be a great fault if we were to give in to sadness and take a sombre view even of ourselves. We need to enlarge our hearts. *I ran in the way of your commandments, for you ENLARGED my heart*. If we are ill-humoured, everything will become wearisome, and we shall not be able to preserve charity, humility, submissiveness to our Superiors. But if we are in good heart everything will go smoothly for us, and we shall find sweetness in our acts of submission. So let us first dispose ourselves to faith, hope and holy joy. *Rejoice in the Lord*. Then everything will become easy. Pray to God and our Lady — for yourself and for me — and write to me.

Yours affectionately,

A. R.

7. To the cleric Emilio Belisy at Prior Park

Turin, 11 March 1837

My dear Emilio,

If I am slow in replying to you, you must not think that your letters are the less welcome and appreciated (...) I constantly pray to the Lord to make you all great in *humility*, in *self sacrifice* and in *the most perfect charity*. Try to be a model of submission and obedience. This is quite certainly the surest way to please the divine Majesty — as it is also what the devil, the father of lies, tries with all his subtlety to destroy by his sophistry and also, I would say, *by philosophy and empty deceit*. We stand firmly by the words of Christ: *whoever wishes to follow me must deny himself*. How gracious is the love of submission! Oh blessed ignorance! *You may run hither and thither, but you will never find tranquillity save in humble subjection to a superior*, as says the golden book of the *Imitation of Christ*. This wisdom surpasses all other: it comprises everything; other teachings are only partial. Let us hold to what is all-embracing.

I hear good news of your brother, thank God. Goodbye.

Yours affectionately in Christ,

A. R.

8. To Don Luigi Gentili at Prior Park

Turin, 11 March 1837

My dear brother in Christ,

Your welcome letter of 27 February came opportunely to put my mind at rest — the lack of news from you had made me anxious about your health.

Concerning the doctrine of religious vocations, it is true in general that we speak of following a counsel, not a precept; and so there is no sin when someone does not follow the counsel — since sin always consists in transgressing against a precept. I must admit that the opposite teaching is false: it causes distress to souls and has led to abuses. So guard against being over strict in this matter. All the same, it is certain that when someone fails to accept a religious vocation when he could well do so, he deprives himself of an infinite good; and for anyone who has the light of faith and a great love for God, to forgo an increase in spiritual good is truly an intolerable loss. Besides, we have no way of knowing what obligations arise in someone else through internal inspirations of grace. We *can* be certain that God requires of certain individuals what he does not ask of all, so that for these a counsel may in fact be a precept, even though normally speaking it would not be one. But when we are directing souls we must never speak with too much certainty about this point (since it is something known only to God). All we can do is to exhort individuals to examine themselves carefully and not to fail, through self-love or attachment to earthly goods, to respond to the internal inspirations of the Holy Spirit.

I urge you to be strong in soul and to be cheerful in dealing with your brethren. Fondest regards to you all, with my blessing.

Yours affectionately in Christ,

A. R.

9. To the Abbé de la Mennais in Paris

San Michele della Chiusa, 22 March 1837

My dear Abbé,

I believe that a friendly word spoken to a heart that is full of bitterness cannot be disagreeable. This thought prompts me to address this letter to you. It is a confrere of yours who writes; he is a priest who shares from afar all your distress; he neither has nor could have any ulterior motive; he is moved simply by fraternal charity. It is this which for a long time has caused him to worry over you and feel the need to say to you in all simplicity: —What are we about? Do we no longer believe in the words of Jesus Christ? And what will become of us if we do not believe? Do we wish to lose our souls?' This is the thought — simple but terrifying — that (it seems to me) you have lost sight of: one which worldly wisdom may well disdain, but which is not the less fearful for that. I do not presume to enter further into any sort of controversy with you⁴; I only want to act on the need I feel in my heart to speak to you freely (and oh, forgive what I say, even if my words seem harsh or rash, because at root they are sincere and loving). Think, my dear brother, of your soul. Alas, it is losing its way: it is on the road to being lost! And how can it be otherwise if you, whose soul has been filled with grace through the sacraments of the Catholic Church; you who have been signed with the blood of the Lamb, when he imprinted on your forehead the character of Christian and priest which you will carry bright and indelible for all eternity — how can you distance yourself now from that Catholic Church which is your Mother; from whom you have received spiritual regeneration, a dignity greater than that of angels, and the indelible sign of Jesus Christ's perpetual dominion over you? Is it possible that, from the fact that the Church has condemned some opinion of yours, the words of Christ have suddenly ceased to be true — 'He who hears you hears me'? Is it possible that all of a sudden you have forgotten those other words which a little while ago shone with such brightness in your mind and nourished your heart with such high hopes: 'You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall never prevail against it'? Is it possible that within your soul your faith in the prayer of Jesus Christ has all at once been extinguished — the prayer that can never fail to be heard by the Father, and that says to us for our comfort: —I have prayed for you, Peter, that your faith may never fail?

My dear brother, let us turn back without delay; let us shelter in the arms of our loving Mother, where alone our spiritual salvation is to be found.

Your writings after your return from Rome show a soul which is profoundly sad, greatly wounded. What is to be said? Do we not want to endure with fortitude

⁴ On 19 June 1828 Rosmini had written a long letter to the Abbé de la Mennais, finding fault with his teaching on the criterion of certainty.

those trials, however hard, to which divine Providence subjects us? Shall we be so fainthearted as to renounce our loyalty to the Church because the combat has become difficult, or because those who direct the battle do not act in a way pleasing to an ordinary soldier? Ah, we cannot enter into the eternal counsels of the One who in an invisible fashion through his Vicar guides his Church and apportions trials to his servants. It is Jesus Christ who tests your faith, and who looks to see whether your faith will survive the test or fail miserably. He is there to judge you according to the outcome. Let it not be said that all you have done, which appears to be so great, is without firm roots.

The distress of soul you are suffering (there is no denying) deserves at once compassion and sympathy; because great strength (I would even say superhuman strength) is needed if you are to sacrifice the ideas which have for so long dominated your whole mind. But there can be no doubt that if, humbly prostrate at the feet of the Christ who dwells in our tabernacles, you ask for his divine power to come quickly to the aid of your human weakness, you will never leave there without feeling yourself another man, a man with complete control over himself.

On the other hand, it is precisely the disturbance within your soul which makes it the more difficult for you to give a faithful and sincere submission to the words of the Vicar of Jesus Christ, since that disturbance, obscuring your vision, impedes you from understanding the decisions of the Head of the Church. Instead of taking those decisions in all their simplicity, as they were given, your imagination adds to them a whole mass of other things which they do not contain at all. I would even say that your soul (allow me to speak plainly), angered perhaps by merely accessory matters, aims only at revenge. It seems as if in this hostile spirit you omit no opportunity to make it appear that those you mistakenly regard as your enemies (I mean the Holy See) are in the wrong; and that moved by this zeal you attribute to the Holy See many doctrines that are not contained either in the Encyclical or in the letter of Cardinal Pacca. Doubtless, before you wrote such things you persuaded yourself that they were true; but this false persuasion, this fallacy that you yourself created, is exactly what makes it vastly more difficult for you to give a humble filial submission.

You believe, and would have others believe, that in the letter of Cardinal Pacca *both civil and political liberty* were ruled out; but if you will re-read the letter with the calm that God will give you, you will find no condemnation of anything but 'the teachings about civil and political liberty contained in *L'Avenir*'— which is quite a different matter. And the reason for this condemnation is given in the same letter, where we read that these ideas were proscribed because — they tend of their nature to excite and spread everywhere a spirit of sedition and rebellion among subjects against their rulers.— Again, you have persuaded yourself that the letter condemns always and in every case —freedom of worship and freedom of the press'. Yet in reality it is only —the teachings of *L'Avenir*— in this connection that are condemned — because they contain so

much exaggeration and are taken to such an extreme by those responsible for that journal. Moreover it is expressly stated in the letter that —in certain circumstances prudence dictates tolerating these liberties to prevent greater harm'. What do you think? Would you maintain that freedom of worship and freedom of the press involve no harm at all? The most you could say in their favour is simply that at times the damage they cause is less than the good they bring about; and that it would lead to greater harm if such liberties were taken away. And if you say this, are you not saying just what the Dean of the Sacred College says in his letter — in effect what the Holy Father says through his intermediary? It would be easy for me, and even easier for you, to find expressed in your writings the same opinion; and in your heart-rending last published work with the title *Affaires de Rome*, you say yourself that you wished that the Church had established *la liberté sur l'éternel fondement de tout ordre: la loi morale qui doit régler l'usage, et qui en garanti la durée.* [*liberty upon the eternal basis of all order: the moral law, which should regulate its use, and which is the guarantee that it will last.*]

So how can we sum up the decisions of the Church contained in the Encyclical? Their gist is the declaration that it is contrary to the spirit of Christianity that subjects should rebel against those who rule them. In this decision there is no mention of specific forms of government; it applies equally to Imperial Russia, to the United States, to the Swiss Cantons. The Church recognizes all legitimate established forms of government, precisely because she does not interfere with temporal matters, provided that they do not concern the eternal salvation of souls, which is her domain. Now what reasonable objection can be made against such teaching? In the Old Law there was condemnation of popular risings and those who fomented them (Lev XIX, 16). The New Law, the law of love and meekness, could in this connection do no other than complete and perfect the Old. When the disciples of Jesus wished to oppose the public authorities who came to arrest him, he reproached them for their lack of faith, saying that if he had wished to use force, he had no need to make use of men, for he could easily have had legions of angels at his command. And does not Christ live and reign just the same now? Is a man who was made from the dust of the earth going to lend his help to the Almighty? But Jesus Christ expressly said that he did not wish to use such means as these; and he gave the reason: he did not have to conquer his kingdom as do earthly kings, by using the means the world offers them. Rather, his kingdom was to come by means of a principle that is invisible and supernatural, the only one that is capable of winning souls. *My kingdom is not of this world.* And what are we priests but disciples of Jesus Christ? What power have we except the word of God? This is the two-edged sword which, as St Paul [Heb 4, 12] says, penetrates to the marrow, divides the soul from the spirit; and this sword is as omnipotent as God himself: it is the unique weapon of the priest.

On the other hand, what kind of thing is a rebellion? What, unless an indescribable mass of misdeeds and evils? And anyone who foments a rebellion

— does he not share in all those misdeeds and iniquities, precisely because he is in part the author of them? You tell me that beyond this sea of misdeeds are to be found the Fortunate Isles⁵, and that for this reason the sea must be crossed. But has this ever been the teaching of the Church? Or of Christ? And will it ever be? We read in St Paul: *We are not to do evil so that good may come*. I find all the Fathers in agreement, all ecclesiastical writers, and the conscience of all the faithful too, in holding that Christianity is a doctrine of such rectitude and justice that it will never permit the least sin, even when through such a sin one could save the whole world and open the prison of hell.

Against this, has the Church ever forbidden the opinion that the Providence of God can draw good, even great good, from rebellions? I would say rather that she encourages us to believe this; since there is no evil in the world that is not permitted by God in order to draw from it a greater good. This is why Christ said: —Occasions for stumbling are bound to come'; but does he justify the one who produces them? Rather, he adds: —But woe to the one by whom the stumbling-block comes'. It is certain that in the end the cause of Jesus Christ has been served by all the tyrants who shed the blood of the martyrs; all the evil men who have preached iniquity in the world; all the vicious people who promote immorality; so too all the revolutions in empires, all uprisings in cities, all massacres, fires, slaughters — all these have served the cause of Jesus Christ. What indeed does not serve this divine cause? Heresy, schism, apostasy, hell itself — all work only for the glory of the Redeemer and his Spouse, who is never separated from him. So we shall work for the cause of the Church whether we want to or not; whether we obey her or not; whether we are joined to her or not.

But let us suppose that you succeed in moving people to rebel; suppose that, after a vast number of calamities, the world is renewed in happy, pristine youth; suppose that the Church itself comes out of all this the more beautiful for the violence that has taken place, and that there is a return to the times of the earliest Christians. . . what then, my dear friend? Will you have done a good work? Certainly the work will have been good in its effect — but not good for you. You will have co-operated with the glory of the Church, but in the way that those who disobey her do so: willy-nilly. You will have been an instrument in the hand of God — just as his enemies are; but not like his friends who are engrafted in the Vine. —What does it profit a man. . .? A branch that is cut off is thrown into the fire.—

You are free, then, to believe that in the hand of God revolutions may be more or less useful to the Church. This is not a condemned opinion. You are free to judge the circumstances of the time as menacing, and if you like, to air your convictions. But you are not free to do so in such a way that through your

⁵ The Fortunate Isles were the fabulous islands of the Western Ocean, the abode of the blessed dead.

actions you foment the hideous ills that seem to you to be necessary as means towards a restoration of the world and the Church. I have noticed that you wish to make the Holy See seem to contradict itself, since it does not prohibit the Catholic Irish people from defending their rights. But here again you confuse two quite different matters. The person who has the greatest influence in Irish affairs does not encourage those people to rebel: rather, he keeps them in due submission. His plan is to make use of *legal means* for the benefit of his country. And do you imagine that the Holy See forbids people from using means that are permitted by law?

You then exaggerate to yourself the meaning of the decisions of the Apostolic See: that is, you add to them what they do not say; and in this way (I have to say) you make filial obedience impossible. No, the Holy See does not separate itself from peoples: rather, it is their centre of union: it embraces equally peoples, kings, governors and subjects. And to all equally it preaches justice and charity. The separation of the Holy See from peoples is a false conclusion that you deduce from false premises.

Calm yourself I beg you, for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ; calm the agitation which prevents you from seeing the whole truth. If you will enter into yourself calmly; if in a tranquil state of mind you will read again what you have written, you will find a certain amount of chaos, where heavenly light is mixed with infernal darkness. At times your style seems on fire with the zeal of an apostle; but on another page you adopt the tone of a romanticizing prophet, as if you were playing with the word of God, without any fear of that sentence which characterizes false prophets: —I did not send the prophets, yet they ran'. Sometimes you leave this world altogether, and then your country is heaven, and your treasure is the nakedness of the cross; but the next minute you show a nationalistic spirit which is quite different from Christian charity, and you speak of finance, of industry, of commerce — as if Jesus Christ, in making you his priest, had given you the mission of occupying yourself entirely with worldly affairs. On the one hand you bring out the meekness of the martyrs who confessed Jesus Christ, and you recognize the irresistible power of virtue and truth; on the other you want everything to be brought about by force. You are never so eloquent as when you detest the brute force which has always tried to rule the world; and then, instead of opposing to it an entirely hidden and spiritual force (which works within the soul and conquers the world without conflict), you have recourse to that same brute force, and speak of it as though you wish it to be believed that it is in this alone that you repose all your hopes. But no! The Church does not work like that and never will; since its divine Founder has said that the kingdom of God comes *without being observed* [Le. secretly, in a hidden fashion] — and not through tumult and violence.

Let us be persuaded, my dear brother, that no one is necessary to Christ or to his Church; and we priests, in calamitous times like these, must hear the voice of Christ, who says: —And will you also go away?' Oh let our response be

unanimous: —Lord, to whom shall we go?' What refuge can we find by abandoning Christ and his Church? Is it possible for us to withdraw entirely from the spiritual order of things and confine ourselves to the purely temporal order? This idea, which I have come across in your writings, has horrified me. What does a priest of Jesus Christ hope to find in a *purely temporal order*? No, his heart will never find satisfaction. He will be a wretched creature who, having lost his way, wanders about in an empty forest, and there dies of hunger or is devoured by wild beasts.

I will say no more. I have already been too lengthy, and perhaps intrusive. But remember that this importunity comes solely from love, utterly dismayed at the thought of a fellow-priest possibly being lost. If you will spare a single minute for this thought, if you will send up a single act of love to Jesus you will no longer resist God's voice, which surely is not silent in your soul.

I am with profound respect,

Your humble servant in Christ,

ROSMINI p.

10. To Don Antonio Rey at Prior Park

San Michele della Chiusa, 24 March 1837

My dear Don Antonio,

It is with very great sorrow that I have learnt of your situation. In your resolution [to leave the Institute], have you really been guided by the Spirit of God? Or have you been led by your own spirit? This is the terrible question that you have to face. Is it possible that a priest who should be entirely devoted to seeking perfection can abandon the way that leads to it? And why? For wretched motives that look not to the future life but to the present one. If you will examine yourself you will surely find that the motives that led you to take this step were not reasons to do with God and your soul. Will it then be a help towards your eternal salvation if you take the yoke of the Lord off your shoulders and renounce the cross of Christ? Will this give you consolation when you are at the point of death, which may be closer than you think? —If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit.' Think about this. For my part I want to be able to say: —I am innocent of this man's blood'. And so if you abandon yourself, it will not follow that I have abandoned you — rather I want to do everything I can to regain you. I am willing, then, to allow you to re-enter the Institute [if you feel] true humility and better understand the deceits of your enemies. Not only will I allow this, but I exhort you, I pray you, I conjure you in Jesus Christ to do so. Oh, do not faint-heartedly leave the way of self-denial and the cross, which is the one we are called to! This cross and this self-abnegation form the spirit of the Institute: accept this spirit.

I am confident that you will fully console me in my affliction with a letter of yours. I am sure you will not only get over this crisis, but will become better than ever before. May the Spirit of Christ guide you and strengthen you!

Yours,

A. R.

11. To Don Antonio Rey⁶ at Prior Park

Stresa, 4 May 1837

My dear Don Antonio,

I know very well that you are not bound by vows to the Institute. If you were, I would not have put to you the question: —Was the spirit which moved you to make such a resolution the Spirit of God or your own spirit?' In such a case the thing would have been certain, not doubtful. But precisely because you are free to stay or go, it seems to me that you have to put a similar question to yourself. Your freedom may make you open to being misled by self-love — which at times can be a clever theologian in support of a bad argument. What I hope is that, putting aside all subtlety of reasoning, you will examine yourself before your Creator and ask yourself whether the reasons for your step come of the thought of eternity and the desire to please God, or whether instead they stem from some distress in the present life. The Spirit of God is the Spirit of Jesus Christ; and the Spirit of Jesus Christ is one of humility, meekness, self-denial and mortification. These are the characteristics of God's Spirit. But the spirit of the devil is quite contrary to these things. — all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

You must not believe then, that I have the temerity to decide whether you have sinned or not in what you have done. Rather, I have to say that you have not sinned, since no man can condemn his brother unless he knows him to have failed in a *clear obligation*. Now, I do not see that you have any clear obligation to remain in the Institute; and so for my part I conclude that you have not sinned. But what does this decision of mine amount to? It offers nothing for your consolation. If I were in your situation I would not consider it satisfactory, but would say: —It is the Lord who judges me'. We have to consider how it would be at the moment of death, that moment when all *trivial distinctions* vanish — those distinctions with which we can sometimes quieten our consciences, but not change the judgement of God. The law that I would want you to consult is the law of love: I have written to you fully persuaded that you are a true lover of Jesus Christ, or that you sincerely wish to be such. If the desire of your heart is to please Jesus as much as possible, if your aim is to reach *perfection*, then take my words in their true sense. Every trial borne for love of Jesus Christ is in this context the easy and sweet yoke of Jesus; every mortification suffered with resignation and humility after his example is the holy and blessed cross of his disciples. When he says: —take my yoke upon you' and —whoever wishes to follow me must deny himself and take up his cross'

⁶ Don Antonio Rey left the Institute in March 1837. remained for some years at Prior Park under Mgr Baines, and then went to America. He died there in 1847 as a result of his charity in helping the victims of a plague. See the *Life of Luigi Gentili* by G. B. Pagani, pp. 197-8

— these words are the voice of the most tender love, and lovers of him understand them. They do not refer only to religious vows or to obligations under pain of mortal sin: they invite everyone to something greater. The law of grace is not the rigorous law of Moses: in this delightful law, justice [holiness] must abound. —Unless your justice abounds more. . . ' But all the same, if you say to me: —I want only to avoid mortal sin — nothing more', I could only reply by silently begging the divine mercy to enlarge your heart. For Christ is only to be found by love, and love is essentially a desire — without limits, without any sort of restriction — for him. But I still say that I would never dare think ill of your soul.

Still, given that I am persuaded that you aim at perfection, and that you wish to put off yourself entirely so as to put on Jesus Christ, together with his humility and his mortification, allow me to urge you to ask yourself seriously whether by the step you have taken you have tried to advance in perfection. I really cannot think so, and I am sure that in your inmost conscience you do not believe it either. However I examine the reasons behind your departure as you expound them in your letter (supposing that they are the whole truth), I rather discover in them things that, while humiliating to human nature, are not really spiritual motives. It all comes down to a lament arising from bruised self-love! If you judge of this motive in the light of the sayings and example of our divine Master, you will see how little it is worth. On the other hand, that a Superior has offended you, or that he does not suit your temperament — these things are purely accidental (though so disposed by Providence). And do you want your change of state to depend on mere accidental circumstances?

Lastly, did I not ask you to let me know if you felt you could not stand the trials which being with Don Luigi [Gentili] caused you, and promise that I would move you elsewhere in such a case? Yet you, without writing to me, have taken a step that has caused me much deep sorrow, greatly surprised the Monsignor [Baines]. and led to much harm (in his view) — as well as disconcerting us all! In all this, what has happened to prudence, charity and propriety? I certainly do not impute any malice to you, but blame it rather on the temptation that has brought you to such a situation. Because of all this, and persuaded as I am that you have not acted with due calm of mind, but that this has been an accidental lapse, I am not only not unwilling to receive you again into the Institute (if I find that your dispositions are such as befit a disciple of Jesus crucified) but I go further and invite you to return; and I believe it is love that moves me so to act. I urge you to pray, to think of death, and to make acts of self-contempt. You must acquire the habit of —despising yourself'. May God bless you. Console me with a reply that will satisfy my desires. Goodbye.

Yours in Christ,

A. R.

12. To Don Francesco Puecher at the Sagra di San Michele

Stresa, 7 May 1837

My dear brother,

You speak of the imbalance between the numbers of French and Italian brethren: I will reply about this another time. For now, I should like you to take note that: (1) it is necessary to try every means of uniting them. Tell Pagani to make every effort to gain the confidence of the French, showing them all affection, and even treating them preferentially in relation to the Italians. Tell him in my name that we have to act not simply by our *natural* inclinations, but according to charity. (2) It is necessary also to imbue the students with a wish to become integrated, showing the Italians that the charity at which they must aim must make them have a great love for the French; and so too persuading the French that they cannot become perfect in charity unless they despoil themselves of all nationalistic feelings, and form one family with the others. And so there is a need in both public and private instructions to stress greatly the need to acquire *perfect charity*. (3) To appoint a Frenchman as master for the French, and an Italian for the Italians would not overcome the lack of charity — it would merely cover it up; it would remain fixed and obdurate in people's minds and hearts, without coming to a head and being cured.

My dear brother, believe me, it is better to put up with the clashes (which, when they occur among people living together, can lead in the end to a lessening of the divisions) than to have a sort of peace without real virtue. This is why I regard it as a great benefit to have houses of mixed nationalities, even though this may produce some problems. These are a minor evil, and a greater good can accompany them. Goodbye in haste.

Yours,

ROSMINI p.

13. To an anonymous deacon at San Michele della Chiusa

Stresa, 7 May 1837

My dear brother,

I was very sorry to hear about the distress you felt on the occasion of the ordinations. Is it possible for a member of the Institute of Charity to fail in good sense to the extent that he wavers in his own vocation simply because of a *fear* that his Superiors might defer his ordination to the priesthood? What have we come to, my dear brother? This horrifies me, because it means one of two things: either you have not grasped what principles direct the Institute, or you have understood them without the courage to profess them. I urge you, then, to think seriously about this; think whether when you decided to enter this Institute you at the same time meant to accept its principles. I do not want you to lie either to yourself or to God. And so that you will be able to think about these matters in a mature way, I shall put before you just what are the principles which must be embraced by anyone who wishes to be a member of the Institute.

(1) Anyone who enters it must be convinced that he is *unworthy* to become a priest (such was the conviction of the saints); and he must fear so great a *dignity*, and be inclined to ask his Superiors to postpone it rather than bring it forward, if in fact he is destined for it. This is the way all the saints behaved: only pride and a superficial mind could prompt a contrary disposition.

(2) In general, no one should aspire to attain a greater dignity, but each should rest content in his present state, as the Rule requires, and as humility, the foundation of our whole profession, dictates.

(3) For the same reason, and to be more pleasing to God, as well as to be more free to be employed in works useful to our neighbour, a member of the Institute professes total **INDIFFERENCE** to any state, grade, position, place and everything else.

(4) A member of the Institute promises complete **OBEDIENCE**, attentive to all the requirements of his Superiors, seeing them as ministers of divine Providence, without seeking for reasons, and *much less questioning* or objecting to what they decide.

I think it is necessary for you to meditate well on these four points, which form the substance of the life which you profess; and if you do not want to embrace them, or if they displease you, then leave the Institute. I want only those who find these principles pleasing, and who *sincerely* propose, with God's help, to be guided by them. Anyone else *I do not want*, since they would be lying to God if they professed our vows.

My dear brother, you are free, then, to stay or to leave; but if you remain with us you have to strip yourself of worldly prejudices and begin to understand the spirit of our profession. Otherwise what would it profit you to listen to so many instructions and have so many beautiful rules of perfection written in the book but not in your heart?

If after you have thought about all this you wish to remain with us, you must in that case give me a *promise* in writing that you will conform yourself in future, with God's help, to the four principles I give above. Without such a resolution you will very soon fail in your vocation, for harder commands may be given to you than that of holding back from ordination. Such a command was not in fact given: you only *suspected* that it was; and through this suspicion you upset yourself so much!

After you have made this written promise to me, you will be content to carry out a penance for your fault (a fault which contained many in one); and the penance will be this: first, that after you have been ordained, you will refrain for a month from celebrating Mass, so as to prepare yourself with greater humility and spirit of indifference for your first celebration of the holy sacrifice. St Ignatius wished to spend a whole year preparing for his first Mass. Will it be hard for you to wait a month after committing such a fault? And, second, during this month while you do not celebrate Mass, you will every day say whatever prayers and carry out whatever penances your Father Master may impose on you.

My dear brother, be charitable towards yourself: enter into your soul and become a *man* in Christ; get rid of the defects and misjudgements that belong to the stage of *childhood*. Do not judge things from the point of view that you brought into religious life from the world, or in the way that so many clerics unfortunately behave, showing empty and superficial minds. Rather, judge according to *truth*.

I hope that you will console me and draw some profit from this deplorable lapse. May God bless you and enlighten you through his Holy Spirit. *Amen*.

Your brother in Christ,

A. R.

14. To Don Matteo Gottardi⁷ at Magasa

Stresa, 7 May 1837

My dear Don Matteo,

Because I know you, I must tell you that you need to have more courage in the Lord. Is he not our strength? Then what cause have we to fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life: of whom shall I be afraid?' So what I recommend is that you should join *study* to the care of your flock; and I am sure you have plenty of time available for this. Make it your aim to study holy scripture with the help of a good commentary (such as that of Tirino); also get hold of some of the works of the Fathers, and of St Thomas [Aquinas]. Again, I should like you to continue with the study of philosophy which you began in Rovereto. I consider that this will be very useful to you, both in forming your mind and in fitting you to understand in depth the scriptures, the Fathers and the Doctors of the Church. My dear friend, I become ever more persuaded that one of the greatest ills that afflict the clergy in our day is that they have abandoned the great sources and founts of Christian doctrine and drawn only on shallow streamlets. By prayer and contemplation joined with study you will prepare yourself to fulfil the will of God. Pray always for —

Yours affectionately,

ROSMINI p.

⁷ Don Gottardi was one of Rosmini's assistants during his time as Archpriest of San Marco in Rovereto.

15. To Professor Cesare Cantu in Milan

Stresa, 11 May 1837

My dear and esteemed Signor Cantu,

What you say about the verdict that Professor Poli passed on my philosophical works seems to me to be true⁸: generally speaking, I would say that people do not take due care to understand authors. In consequence they either misinterpret them or completely fail to understand them. In the latter case, they take a phrase from here and another from there and join them together as people take the skin of a wild beast, stuff it, and put it up as a trophy or a scarecrow, and then say: —Here is the philosophy of Monsieur so-and-so'. So what can be done about this? The best thing is to leave it to time to separate the wheat from the chaff with its great sieve. I certainly am not anxious for people to accept my views. I chiefly wish that they should be understood. But with every day that passes I become more convinced that (generally speaking) people do not even suspect that the subject calls for concentrated thought simply to understand what is being dealt with.

All the same, my dear Cantu, I confess that I have a clear intuition and a profound conviction of what I am saying and I believe that what I am writing is the truth, and that in these matters there is a hidden guide — God himself. He knows the times and the moments, and I have great confidence that he will bring to maturity the health-giving fruits that accrue to men from those seeds that are sown through a divine impulse (as I hope) simply in obedience to his will.

I ask you, to whom God has granted so great a heart and fine understanding, to accompany me in everything of which you approve, and see that I do not lose my way. I am sure that you will give your support to my intention.

What is Manzoni doing? Remember me to him. Abbot Fenner will give you a copy of my parochial sermons. Believe me I am always —

Yours gratefully and affectionately,

ROSMINI p.

⁸ In his *Manual of Philosophy* Poli had, by changing the meaning of words, made out that Rosmini was one of the Rationalists and Idealists. (See *Vita di A. Rosmini* vol. I, p.583.)

16. To the priest Carlo Felice Rusca, chaplain to the Sisters of Providence

Stresa, 11 May 1837

My dear brother,

I wish you to take note of these points:

(1) Be careful never to speak of the defects of the Sisters except to Superiors, and for the good of those in your care. By acting in this way you will preserve charity towards them, show prudence, and give edification.

(2) When you speak to Superiors about the defects of the Sisters, be careful never to hold them up to ridicule or use biting words: treat of their faults with great respect and in a serious manner.

(3) Do not go about the convent without necessity; and when you really need to do this, make sure that you are accompanied by the Superior when you visit the various rooms.

(4) In general be guarded in your conversation, especially with lay people; speak frankly and simply, but never too freely or indiscreetly, in a way contrary to religious modesty and prudence. With this point in mind, read often our Rules of Modesty.

(5) Make it your care to acquire little by little the habit of being *orderly* in all that you do, as well as to perfect yourself in mental prayer and all the other exercises practised in the houses of the Institute.

(6) Work out a method that will allow you to give an hour each day to the study of scripture, and another to the *Summa* of St Thomas [Aquinas]. When it happens that you cannot find two hours free, at least give one to the study of St Thomas.

Father General

17. To Don Carlo Gilardi at the Sagra di San Michele

Stresa, 15 May 1837

My dear brother,

I hope that you, my dear Don Carlo, will daily grow in the wisdom that can only be acquired through experience and through the habit of looking coolly and deliberately at every aspect of matters that come up. In the meantime, resolve to grow in the sort of virtue that will greatly help us to do everything so as to promote *God's* glory and charity towards our neighbour. In this way we shall gain great merit for ourselves.

To give you an example of the need we have for sound judgement, my dear brother, I should like to refer to what you tell me in your letter of 12 May. You describe how you were asked: —if it would be impossible for a man to be received into the Institute if he desired neither to become a priest nor to be subjected to the heavy burdens of lay people'. And you tell me that you replied that in your judgement this did not seem to present an insoluble problem. Is it possible that you know the Institute so little, and that you do not yet realize that it accepts no one who puts the slightest condition to obedience and indifference — the virtues in which consists the whole spirit of the Institute? You should have seen at a glance that the person concerned was a thousand miles from our vocation! *Goodbye.*

ROSMINI p.

18. To an unnamed priest at Domodossola

Stresa, 16 May 1837

My dear brother in our Lord Jesus Christ,

. . . I come now to the defects in yourself that you recognize and confess with such candour. I should like you to pay close attention to what I have to say.

The first thing you have to look at — and this seems to me to be the cause of your most notable defects — is a lack of *GENEROSITY*. This is the virtue, my dear brother, which must form the spirit of our Institute. The Institute of Charity calls for *GENEROUS SOULS*, because charity itself is generous. In fact if the love of God is foremost in us we shall regard all the things of this world *ut stercora* [as dung], as St Paul says. And again, if the love of God rules us, we shall subdue all merely human affections. But among these human affections the lowest and most vile, the most unworthy of a priest of the Institute of Charity, is attachment to material gain. To learn to detest any such preoccupation with worldly goods, reflect from time to time on the case of Judas. It was not for nothing that Christ allowed Judas to act as he did! It was so that he would be an eternal and terrible reminder to his priests and to all his disciples [of this danger]. Stir yourself, then: let the whole commitment of your soul be for Jesus Christ, for the works of charity to which you are called and consecrated in the Institute. There is no reason why you should be so indulgent towards flesh and blood: such connivance does spiritual harm to yourself and to those around you.

My dear brother, can you not see that God is treating you as the eagle treats its young? It carries them up on its wings and then releases them, lets them fall, so that they can fly. It is time that you too should no longer be carried on God's wings (so to speak), but should use your own wings and fly.

Certainly the situation of being on your own is difficult. But it means that divine Providence *wants* to exercise you in the virtue of *FORTITUDE*; wants you to begin to act like a man, to learn to behave with wisdom and manly courage. So set about this task and become strong; get a grip on yourself, and act as you would if your Superior were at your side. *Can* he always be by you? Certainly not. Very often we shall have to be on our own; and then is the moment to show strength and judgement worthy of a man. Read and study closely No. 15 of the Common Rules and you will see how a member of the Institute must sometimes fend for himself; and for this he has to be wise and strong, and not for ever act like a child. Now if you rouse yourself, arm yourself with fortitude and reform your way of thinking, you will grow in *prudence* and show better judgement, and solid sense in your words and actions. These qualities are certainly not attained in a day; but they are sooner acquired when one applies the strength of a decisive will-power.

I urge you also to: (1) say your Office unhurriedly, with all devotion and actual attention, as far as this is humanly possible; (2) try to make daily progress in the diligence with which you carry out your other religious exercises — meditation, examination of conscience and so on; (3) ensure that you do not flag in your love of teaching in the school, seeing this as the means destined by God for your sanctification; (4) acquire the necessary patience with the children, and love them tenderly in Jesus Christ.

So courage, my dear brother: do all these things diligently: To everyone who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna.—

Now I come to the matter of penance. I impose on you for a time by way of penance for your defects, and as a way of acquiring virtue: (1) that you learn by heart chapter 4 of the Common Rules On the Spirit of Understanding'), and the Rules of Modesty; (2) that every fortnight you spend a day of retreat at Calvario, so as to meditate on the affairs of your soul and on your holy vocation to perfection; (3) that you copy this letter into your booklet of personal directions, and read it from time to time; (4) and lastly that you pray to our Lady, asking her for the grace of perseverance in your vocation, of complete detachment from your family and from worldly interests, together with a love of suffering for the sake of Jesus Christ. Pray for me.

A. ROSMINI p.

19. To Don Paolo Barola in Rome

Stresa, 16 May 1837

My dear Don Paolo,

I have received your letter of 5 May, in which you mention a church and house that could be acquired from the Cardinal Vicar for our Institute; and since this Institute takes for its rule the direct and immediate service of the Holy See, I have always believed that it could never be said that its foundation was complete (even if it had many houses elsewhere) until the time when divine Providence brought it to Rome itself, under the immediate eye of the Pope. But in spite of this persuasion of mine, I have always judged it proper that the Institute should not be too intent on this. For such matters are God's affair, not ours; and God alone knows the right time and moment for everything. So that we must firmly believe that he will not fail to open the door when the time is right for his glory.

With such considerations in mind, I have reflected on what you say in your letter, and at this holy time of Pentecost I have prayed to the Holy Spirit so as to be able to give you an answer. The conclusion I have so far come to is that (before I go any further) I must ask you to tell me two things. The first is, how big, and in what state of repair, is the house you speak of, and the church known as 'Our Lady of Good Counsel'? I should like you to give me a brief but accurate description of everything — the condition of the fabric, whether repairs are needed, if there is any revenue, if there are debts; if the church has any obligations, any legacies, any established duties, who presently occupies it, who were the previous owners, and so on. In other words, let me know whatever you consider it would be useful or desirable to know; also whether there is any garden annexed, what doors and windows there are etc.

The second thing is: whether you make this offer in the name of the Cardinal Vicar, or with his consent; and in any case, *what steps* I need to take in order to acquire the property. After this, my dear Barola, join me in recommending the matter to God, so that we may do everything in accordance with his Spirit and in conformity with his will. As soon as you let me have the information I am asking for, I will write to you at greater length.

In the meanwhile, remember that your concern in this matter is from God, and you will be rewarded for it. In saying this, though, I do not absolve myself from the duty of being most grateful to you — which I certainly am.

Goodbye. Give my respects to His Eminence Cardinal Pacca, whom you have the happiness to serve.

Your grateful servant and friend,

R. p.

20. To Don Alfonso Mendini, Canon and Archpriest of Trent

Rovereto, 13 June 1837

Very Reverend Monsignor,

During my stay in Trent I was always aware of your charity and zeal; and I was assured of the sentiments you are now good enough to express to me. Moreover we undoubtedly have to adore the divine Providence in everything, and rest contentedly in God's hands in all eventualities. I firmly believed, given the circumstances, that I was doing God's will when I closed the Trent house of the Institute; and I closed it with the same contentment with which I earlier opened it. I have never repented of this step, and I am convinced that it made for the greater glory of God, whom alone we seek. It is true that the closure meant that a certain amount of good was lost to Trent; but the divine mercy can compensate for the ending of this good in a thousand ways; and I hope that this will be the case, given the prayers of the many good souls who are to be found there. Would that I myself could share in those prayers! I recommend myself wholeheartedly to yours, and to those of the holy and devout people you know and guide. I beg you to pray that I may be converted in heart to the Lord, and that he may look mercifully on my many shortcomings. Moreover you can be sure that you have in me someone who ever remembers all your favours to me — a humble servant most anxious to be of use to you in any way that you may care to ask of him.

Yours,

ROSMINI p.

21. To Don Agostino Dalla Piazza at Romagno,

Rovereto, 14 June 1837

My dear Don Agostino.

I am happy to write to you, as you ask, before I leave here, and I do so to thank you for the affection you show me in the Lord. This will grow all the greater the closer becomes our union in God, the centre of every true union. It is indeed only our God who unites: all else separates, and men without God — and so without love — must ever cry out, like the Israelites, 'Gather us and rescue us from among the nations'. You see that this is a further reason to go carefully and circumspectly in this age, which is a time wholly given to evil', and to aspire to the eternal possession of the eternal good. So pray for me and, trusting in God, perfect yourself in your holy vocation as a Christian and a priest of the Most High. 'Be holy, for I am holy'.

Fondest regards in our Lord. Goodbye.

Yours,

ROSMINI p.

22. To Don Cesare Flecchia at Tamié⁹

San Michele, 13 June 1837

Beloved Don Cesare — the Lord be with you,

I have received your welcome letter addressed to me at Turin, and I can assure you that you are doing the will of God as you occupy yourself there to the best of your ability. The Lord is perfecting you in this way.

Here is a further occasion for you to exercise patience: I have to send your Fr Rector away on a long journey, and you may have to be without him for two months¹⁰. But I hope that (once the initial difficulties are over) things will get easier.

In the meanwhile, I urge you to use holy discretion in everything: do not overburden the laybrothers with too many tasks, and instruct them in the observance of the Rules, the fear of God and the love of perfection. If their spirit is not nourished, how can they persevere in the path of perfection? Not even the body can make a long journey without food. So it is better that temporal matters should be a little behindhand rather than spiritual things. May the Holy Spirit, whom you will invoke daily, endow you with wisdom, tranquillity and strength. 'Be not afraid, little flock.'

Pray fervently for me too. I embrace and bless all of you there, my dear brethren. Goodbye.

ROSMINI p.

⁹ This letter was not printed in E.C., but the original is preserved in the Rosminian archives at Stresa.

¹⁰ Loewenbruck had to accompany Pagani and Bonnefois to Prior Park.

23. To Don Paolo Orsi at Rovereto

Calvario, 26 July 1837

. . . I cannot possibly convey to you how deep is my sorrow at the loss (of which I have just heard) of the dearest, oldest, and most faithful friend¹¹ I have had in this world. You can gauge the greatness of my grief by what you feel yourself. This unexpected happening warns us that we must be resolute in detaching ourselves from everything, and that it is only God whom we never lose. We must draw profit from this experience by holding dear only that life which never fails, because it is eternal. It would be useless to try to go on at length, looking for other ways of consoling ourselves: there are none. 'I am the resurrection and the life. . . though he is dead he will live'. All the same, make this concession to my human nature send me a detailed account of the illness and last hours of the one who was so dear and is now lost to us. I do not need to tell you that I have offered up suffrages for his soul, and will continue to do so. Goodbye.

Yours most affectionately,

ROSMINI

¹¹ Rosmini is referring to the death (On 17 July 1837) of Don Pietro Orsi, the brother of Don Paolo, who had been his revered master in philosophy.

24. To Don Paolo Barola in Rome

Domodossola, 28 July 1837

My dear Don Paolo,

In order to resolve the difficulty you mention — that the perfection proposed in our Constitutions is excessive and demands too much from mere human beings — you only need to reflect on these considerations:

- (1) There is nothing in the Constitutions which obliges under pain of sin, apart from the vows, whatever is commanded in virtue of holy obedience (as is the case with all religious orders), and what is contained in the laws of God.
- (2) According to the teaching of St Thomas [Aquinas], no religious order requires that a member should be perfect, since religion is a school of perfection — and that implies that there are imperfections in those who entrust themselves to this school. Our Constitutions indeed describe the Institute as such a school, and not as a union of perfect men. This is to be seen from the very first paragraph, in which the Society is described as a union of persons who want to be *disciples* of Christ, united together so as to help one another in the acquiring of perfection.
- (3) It is true that the perfection proposed for those who learn in this school is great; but it is not greater than or different from that of which Christ gave to all his followers the form and example. It would not be possible to invent any other sort of perfection.
- (4) Again it is true that the Constitutions urge the subjects to be indifferent to all that Superiors may command, (as is recommended also by St Basil in his Rule, and by all other holy institutes); but on the other hand, Superiors are obliged to use all discretion and not to impose burdens beyond the strength [of their subjects]. The aim and end of the Institute is the spiritual perfection of its members; and external ministries are simply means to that perfection. Hence Superiors are described in the Constitutions as the spiritual fathers of their subjects. This is why they are bound not to put too great a strain on the virtue of those subjects, but rather to proportion commands to their strength; moreover they have to act in such a way that what they command is in a certain way *voluntary* on the part of the subject himself, assuming that he is commanded in a way conformed to the degree of his good dispositions. It is laid down also that lesser Superiors must give an account of every detail of their rule to major Superiors.
- (5) In this Institute no bodily austerities are prescribed for all. The choice of penitential exercises is left to the fervour of the individual, as guided by his confessor or Superior.

I could add further reflections no less evident, but you (who know my mind) can add them yourself. In the meanwhile, let us recommend the matter devoutly to God and Mary, in whose honour we do everything.

Write to me, and continue to love me. Goodbye,

Your servant and friend,

A. ROSMINI

25. To Don Francesco Puecher at San Michele

Domodossola, 22 August 1837

Beloved brother in our Lord Jesus Christ crucified,

I should like to think that the case concerning N. N. arises from his temperament and inborn prejudices. In my view the first thing must be to enlighten him about the true nature of perfection through calm and timely instruction. He must especially be led to understand that perfection thrives on trials and difficulties as a lamp is kept alight by oil. A soul which has clearly understood this great truth either puts up with conflicts and privations, or while at first resenting the sufferings they bring, controls and masters his feelings, and recovers himself, recognizing that his reaction was contrary to the pursuit of perfection.

This principle — that perfection is nourished by whatever is opposed to our inclinations — banishes every trace of pretension from anyone who is really intent on perfection, and makes him humble and calm of mind.

I think it will be very difficult to ensure in practice that your French novices understand this. But one has to persevere all the more gently and assiduously in preaching it to them, backing up this teaching by referring to the example and actions of Christ and the saints. Moreover this effort is never to be abandoned, and one must *never* be satisfied until the novice has come to have a sincere wish to attain entirely to this perfection and self-abnegation. To send him on in the absence of this desire would be to betray the Institute: it would mean violating its spirit and rules.

May God bless you and give you an ever greater understanding of the infinite value of the cross.

Your servant in Christ,

ROSMINI p.

26. To Don Emilio Belisy at Prior Park

Domodossola, 4 September 1837

My dear brother in our Lord Jesus Christ,

I received at one and the same time your two letters of 18 and 25 August. In the first one you give various reasons which prevented you from sending me exact news of your mission there and of the brethren who are with you. But I was satisfied by none of these, since I see in them too much of human reasoning and too little of that evangelical simplicity which is always blessed by the Lord. All the reasons you give are based on what you thought might be the consequences of your reports. But when a thing is good in itself, as certainly is the case when it comes to informing a Superior about everything so that he can then take such decisions as it may please God to inspire in him, one must think of nothing else. In other words, one must have a lively faith in God and believe that he will bless everything for his greater glory. I beg you with all the force at my command to act on this principle in future. This will also give you greater peace of mind. To look at remote possible consequences and indulge in conjecture often disturbs and troubles the soul; whereas to act with simplicity, as is required by obedience and faithful submission, brings a wonderful peace.

In your letter of the 25th you put to me various reasons why it was thought necessary to send back Bonnefois¹², and I am persuaded by them. All the same it seems to me that you have judged him in a way that shows insufficient regard for his merits with regard to the teaching of philosophy, since I myself examined himself to some extent, and he was examined also on the occasion of his ordination in Turin, with a very satisfactory outcome. In any case, I will do all I can to send you the two companions you ask for, provided that the illness of one of them makes this possible¹³.

I hope that you have received the printed Rules of the Institute. I urge you most strongly for the love of God to make every effort to practise simplicity and obedience — these alone can instil in us the humility which makes a man pleasing in the eyes of the Lord. Goodbye.

Yours in Christ,

ROSMINI p.

¹² Rosmini had sent Don Gioacchino Bonnefois to Prior Park with Don Pagani. But Bonnefois, a holy man but unprepossessing in appearance, remained only a few days in England, because Gentili thought he would make a bad impression, and judged him to be unsuitable as a teacher. So he sent him back to Italy in haste.

¹³ He is referring to Rinolfi and Signini, who were in fact sent to England soon afterwards.

27. To Don Francesco Puecher at San Michele

Domodossola, 5 September 1837

My dear brother in our Lord Jesus Christ,

I seem to detect in you too great a tendency to become discouraged and to lose confidence in the outcome of your efforts with the brethren entrusted to your care. And from this follows too great a readiness to consider sending them away. But this is quite contrary to the spirit of the Institute, which would rather receive aspirants with caution, and then ensure that they did not proceed from one grade to another without a moral certainty that they were sufficiently prepared for this step. But for the rest, since the spirit of the Institute is one of charity, patience and forbearance, the right thing is to work perseveringly and to support those who have come to us, even those who are imperfect, so as not to run the risk of sending away any of those whom God has given to us, when we might win them over and gain them by love and unremitting patience. We might lose them if we did not use every effort in our power, and if we were unwilling to wait a long time to see the fruit of our care. Since our own perfection lies in the exercise of charity, our first duty is to show love towards the souls that divine Providence has confided to our care in the Institute — so imitating the patience of God himself. By acting like this we may one day, through the divine mercy, be able to say, as did Christ, 'I have protected those you gave me, and not one of them was lost; and if one is lost, let it be only a son of perdition'.

The enemy disguises himself in many ways, and there is a great variety of temptations which he puts before souls so as to discourage them — and to discourage those who direct them! So too human nature is changeable and has many moods, so that a person cannot safely be judged on the score of moments of weakness, distraction or weariness. Men are subject to various defects which, though not insignificant, are still perhaps not grave: they do not fundamentally ruin a man. And these imperfections are always capable of cure: they are mostly due to the imagination, and there may be no real malice in the will.

As I see it, the only case in which someone must be sent away is one in which either there is some grave and evident sin, or grave hidden sins frequently committed, with no sign of improvement or significant effort to amend; or finally where there is a perverse and malicious disposition (which can sometimes be discerned by the light which the Holy Spirit will give us if we humbly ask this of him). These are the cases where the Constitutions prescribe immediate and unhesitating dismissal.

There are two other cases where a novice may be dismissed. The first is when his conversation is a source of distraction and annoyance to the others. But if

this behaviour comes about through a liveliness in which there is no malice or obstinacy, no excessive frivolity or empty-headedness, it would be well to resort to every effort in the way of warnings, corrections, punishments — even possibly transfer to another house. But if finally all this is ineffective, he is to be dismissed.

The second case is where the subject shows little ability, when the state of the Institute does not allow of his being adequately cared for, and there is no hope of being useful to him without harming other more important works of charity.

I do not want these rules to be applied to N. N.: his vocation has always seemed to me distinctly doubtful; but I do not know enough about him to be able to make a decision. For the rest, if the only defect in him is that he feels too weak to embrace a life of perfection, I would not have wanted to let him go, but would rather have encouraged him more than ever, and shown him that we are all very weak, but that all the same we must not lose heart, since our strength lies in the grace of God, not in ourselves. Who among us cannot say: 'I can do all things in him who strengthens me' when he prays, implores and knocks? At all events I should have liked you to treat him gently and keep him there even if he wished to go, until you heard further from me, unless he was dead set on leaving. I think there can be cases — though this may not be one of them — where a Superior has to beg someone to stay even though he wishes to leave, kneeling and imploring him, even with tears. This would be in a situation when one could see that the struggle was really with the devil, or a figment of the imagination, or sheer ignorance of the things of God, or was the result of inexperience, as was the case with David, when he had to say of the armour he had put on: 'I am not used to this.—

God bless you and sustain you in all your labours. Amen.

Yours,

ROSMINI p.

28. To Don Giuseppe Maria Toscani at Cameri

Domodossola, 6 September 1837

My dear brother in the Lord and companion in his service,

Allow me to address you like this, with the confidence one uses with brethren. To avoid your making a needless journey, it is better that you should go directly to San Michele; and I advise you to do this as soon as possible, so as to overcome at a blow and in a decisive way the pull which you are afraid of — the pull of flesh and blood. The struggle is all the worse when we allow delay, when we let our thoughts dwell on their call; but it is feeble and even non-existent if we do not deign to pay attention to their voice but generously go ahead — and even put the spurs to our horse if necessary. What we have in mind to do is to make an entire consecration of ourselves to God, with no limits, holding nothing back. We shall not lack God's help when our desire has no other aim than his love and his glory, together with the sweet and most glorious discipleship of him who said: 'Whoever does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple' and 'whoever does not hate father and mother etc. If any want to be my followers, let them deny themselves etc.— Here is the sole wisdom that we aim to embrace with all our heart. There must be no unnecessary delay before hastening to the school that teaches such wisdom. Here we are taught the 'path of righteousness', of which we read 'when you walk in this path your step will not be hampered; and if you run you will not stumble.'

Let us be united in prayer, and love one another. Let me know when you will reach the summit of the mount to which God and St Michael call you.

Your brother and friend in Christ,

A. R. p.

29. To the Marchese Gustavo Bensi di Cavour in Turin

Domodossola, 6 September 1837

My dear and much esteemed Marchese,

Your letter filled me with joy. Blessed be the Lord, who is goodness itself, and who communicates himself to those who turn to him, those whom he has created for this ineffable communion. Certainly, 'He who has begun a good work will perfect it.— And anyone who ponders well on what I am saying will have the answer to the difficulty you touch on, over reaching the summit of perfection. If this were simply our doing, it would be hopeless. But it is the work of God, since perfection is nothing else than the communication of the Creator to the creature; and so the creature, marvelling to himself, and as if unable to explain such a prodigy, exclaims: 'I can do all things in him who gives me strength.— Here we hear the great teaching of St Paul, who declares that justification is not *ex operibus* [from our works], as if it came from ourselves, but *ex fide* [through faith] — that is, through trust in our merciful God.

A while ago I read in a book this saying: 'repentance is the strength of mortal men'; and this is a thoroughly Christian thought. It corresponds to the *faith* St Paul speaks of: faith in the omnipotence of divine goodness through which man, who feels himself to be nothing, hopes for all things; man, who feels himself incapable of perfection, but knows at the same time that God, who calls him to perfection, will also lead him to it; man, who can see only sin within himself, yet sees in that very sinfulness what can give occasion to the greatest glory of God, which consists in infinite mercy. So what should be the attitude of a man who has this faith? He must simply have an intimate realization of his own infinite imperfection and powerlessness to respond to the law of perfection which is put before him, and at the same time believe that God in his infinite goodness is able to bring about his salvation. It is HUMILITY which can close the immense gap which separates us from the summit of perfection. Hence the teaching which Jesus Christ gives us about humility when he says: 'Everyone who humbles himself will be exalted.— And this is identical with the faith of St Paul. So though it is true that we are culpable, guilty of sin, if we are humble we shall still be exalted. To be humble is to recognize the truth, to believe that we are imperfect, to believe in the power of the grace of God, who can make us perfect. 'We have known and believe the love that God has for us', says St John. (1 Jn 4,16). The grace that Jesus Christ communicates to us has its degrees; but every degree, however small it may be, is still infinite, because it is always a communication of the Infinite. I am sure that this will seem marvellous but not incredible to you; because you know the various orders of mathematical infinities, which have a certain analogy with the degrees of grace. You will see that it is only in the doctrine of Christian humility and of *faith* that there is to be found a solution of the grave difficulty that you raise concerning

the unattainable quest for perfection; and that this solution was not the product of any human philosophy. Here again is a proof of the divine nature of Christian teaching! This sovereign doctrine is not afraid to say to man: 'How can a man be justified before God? . . . 'The just man falls seven times a day. . . When you have done all these things, say: —We are useless servants"', since after it has abased man, it raises him up and strengthens him, saying: 'The will of God is your sanctification . . . whatever you ask of my Father in my name shall be given to you. . . Take courage, I have overcome the world'!

What then remains for us to do? We must take the gentle yoke of Christ on our shoulders, always humble the blind arrogance of our sensory nature — and even more the blind pride of our intellect. Just as in ourselves there is an infinite imperfection in the moral order (apart from the grace of Christ), so too in the intellectual order there is an infinite ignorance. It is just as difficult for man, by his own resources, to attain the fulness of virtue as it is for him to attain the fulness of truth. We shall arrive at salvation, despite our imperfections, by virtue of the same source as that from which we shall receive the life-giving light for our mind — the *lumen vitae*. [the light of life] of scripture — despite our ignorance. This light is as bright and burning as the sun, whereas the light of this world offers nothing better than cold and feeble grey rays.

I am certain, my dear Marchese, that if you rely on God's grace he will carry you forward; for he has said: 'I have led you in the paths of righteousness: when you walk, your step will not be hampered, and if you run you will not stumble.— (Prov 4, 11-12).

I have run out of paper, and this tells me that I have put a great strain on your patience. So forgive me, and believe that I am —

Your humble servant,

ROSMINI p.

30. To the subdeacon Niccolò Lorrain¹⁴ at San Michele

Calvario, 25 September 1837

My dear companion in the service of the Lord,

Your letter greatly consoled me, because it showed the sentiments that I should like always to see in my brethren and beloved companions. The feature of it which proved to me that the spirit in which it was written came from God was that I could see that in spite of your fear, or rather your deep dread, of the priestly state, and the pleas you have made to be dispensed from receiving so great an honour, you nonetheless end by showing your willingness to see the divine will in the command of your Superior. And certainly you are not mistaken in this, my dear brother, for as the Church and the Fathers unanimously teach, there is no more sure way of knowing the will of God than that of perfect obedience. So I thank God for your good dispositions, and in the meantime recommend you warmly to the Lord so that he may inspire me and bring me to know what he wants of you — not that this should lessen your efforts in the studies for the priesthood. Instead, I urge you as strongly as I can — and if you wish, command you — to apply yourself to them with all diligence, and to profit by the talents the Lord has given you. I have every hope that you will do so, and this will be pleasing to God, whom I pray without ceasing to bestow on you and on all the others every blessing.

Your servant in our Lord Jesus Christ,

A. R.

¹⁴ Lorrain was received into the Institute at Tamié, and after making his noviciate in Italy was ordained to the priesthood. He was then sent to England, where he did good work for the benefit of souls, teaching and preaching. Later he went to France, and founded the house at Sainghin in 1860. He was the mainstay of this community through his piety and the example he gave of every virtue, until his death in 1875.

31. To Don Luigi Gentili, Superior of the Institute in England

Domodossola, 28 September 1837

Instructions to be read at the foot of the cross

1. I have come to learn that in England there may be the custom, or rather the abuse, of hearing the confessions of girls and women in their own rooms. Although I can scarcely believe that such an abuse exists, still with good reason I forbid you and all our other priests, in virtue of *holy obedience* ever, under any pretext, to hear the confessions of girls or women in private rooms, in the college or anywhere else other than in church. Should these women be sick, the priests are to observe Rule No. 10 of those printed in the Rules of Temporal Coadjutors¹⁵.

2. You are to be punctual even to a scruple (as I have urged you previously) in keeping to the school horary. When the bell sounds, or even a little before, you must leave any other occupation ('not even completing the shape of a letter we had begun', as our Rule says), so as to arrive promptly in your place. You must not keep others waiting, but *willingly wait yourself*, and rather waste a few moments of time than be a moment late. The same punctuality is to be observed when it is a matter of beginning or ending exercises of piety, and indeed at all other times. This matter of punctuality is most important in a Superior who has immediate charge of others.

3. You must never venture to preach or give a lesson when you are ill-prepared. Use due deliberation, and do not be overconfident: look ahead and foresee what you will have to do. If you are short of time, then do less. If you cannot do less, then God will excuse you even when you have failed to prepare yourself to carry out your duties — but you will not be forgiven by men.

4. In the lessons you give, be *brief and exact*; do not compare one nation with another, and do not praise *excessively* the beauties of the Italian language.

5. Try to be very *gentle*, both interiorly and in treating with others, keeping the example of St Francis de Sales before you.

6. Above all, I urge you to cultivate serenity and a calm mind. Do not entertain too many schemes concerning the future, but go ahead from day to day with *clear ideas* and the simplicity of the gospel; listen willingly to others and profit by what they have to say. For prudence consists in considering matters *under*

¹⁵ No. 10 of the Rules for Temporal Coadjutors says: 'What is laid down for priests is to be carefully observed when they are sent to hear the confessions of women or to discuss any matter with them: the priest is *to get his companion to remain nearby so that he can see the priest as he speaks (for as long as the conversation with the woman lasts) but is unable to hear what is said privately.*'

all aspects, not taking a one-sided view. To arrive at this it is necessary to give due weight to the opinions of others, even when their views are opposed to our own, *and even listening to our enemies*.

7. Be *sincere* and *simple* in your reports to me, and *leave nothing out*. It is a grave mistake to conceal the truth, or even part of the truth, from Superiors, or to *exaggerate* one side or another of a situation. To act like this is not to walk in the light of our Lord Jesus Christ.

8. Obey *blindly*: obedience is the mother of all the *evangelical virtues*.

If you heed my advice, God will bless you and your work, since this will be a sign that you put your trust in him and not in yourself.

Your affectionate brother and father,

A. ROSMINI p.

32. To the brethren of the Institute of Charity in the service of God in England

Calvario, 2 October 1837

My dear brethren,

On this occasion, when some other brothers will be joining you, I want to write a few lines to you to remind you of your vocation to the holiness that goes with charity. I urge you most strongly not to stray to right or left, but to go straight ahead along the path to which each of you is called — in other words, to reach true sanctity. This does not consist in any intellectual activity, or in any sort of human prowess or glory, or in the successful accomplishment of external enterprises; but rather in practising those virtues that Jesus Christ, the Saviour and model of our souls, showed forth in his own life, above all as he hung from the cross. They are humility, poverty, self-denial, obedience, mortification, patience, and that ardent charity which comprises them all. It never gets lost in subtleties, but walks in simplicity, not seeking its own interests but those of God and its neighbour. This is the foundation of the Institute you have embraced; it is what you have to keep continually before your minds, so that you may persevere in charity till death, united with this Society not only in body but also in spirit, so that you may not be deceived or lose sight of the one true vision of the Institute, which was born on Calvary and came forth from the Crucified One — since he was the source of the virtues that the Institute takes as its aim, because they constitute its end.

You, my beloved brethren, have all the greater need to keep your eyes fixed on this aim, concentrating on the practice of the evangelical virtues as your only good (since everything else is vanity), in that the service of God where you are at present placed is beset with a good many difficulties, distractions and dangers. But you will be able to overcome these things if you co-operate with the grace that God will not deny you; so the problems you meet with will be so many means for your sanctification and pledges of your future glory. This co-operation with grace consists simply and solely in having your vocation always before your minds, so that it may be your guide and lead you to conform yourselves in perfect submission to the spirit and letter of the Rules which are prescribed for you.

Each of you must first be persuaded that he must not place too much trust in his own opinion and judgement, and believe firmly that of all the dangers to religious life the most insidious is that of trusting solely in our own reasoning. For man, while being a rational creature, is inclined to accept what his intellect tells him without sufficiently considering that his reasonings are narrow, limited and often misleading; whereas the mind of God unerringly embraces all things, present and future, though they remain hidden from our eyes. So each individual, in the way he behaves, must — rather than follow what his own

reasoning suggests — take as his guide only the one lofty and most simple rule: that is, to follow the will of God in imitation of Christ who, when he explained the reasons for his actions, said that he always did the will of his heavenly Father, and that he acted so that the scriptures might be fulfilled — the scriptures which contained precisely what the Father had from all eternity pre-arranged. Hence our whole study, my dear brothers, consists in getting to know the divine will, and not in reasoning and disputing among ourselves whether this or that course of action is better according to our own limited human way of seeing things. Let us be anxious only to discern what are the signs of the will of God, in order to follow them faithfully and in all simplicity, with peace of mind and no opposition from our own intellect. And if you carefully consider, you will easily perceive that there are mainly three signs by which we can come to know God's will unfailingly, if we seek for it with a pure heart.

The *first sign* is the *law of God*, which Jesus Christ revealed to us fully and perfectly; so that theologians call this law *his signified will*. We also read: 'The will of God is your sanctification.' If then this is so, we can be sure that we are acting according to this most holy and lovable will when we labour without ceasing to purify ourselves of all imperfections and to acquire the virtues that constitute holiness. So every time our soul is disturbed and we are in a state of perplexity and doubt, faced by two possibilities, we have to recall that we must prefer the one which is in itself is more conducive to our sanctification: the one which is most in harmony with the teaching of the gospel; and so choose without hesitation the one which best exercises us in self-abnegation, obedience, charity and depreciation both of ourselves and of all that is ours. If we act in this way we can be certain that we shall not go astray but shall be acting according to the best and highest rule: the divine will, which is what we want to follow. It is for this that we have joined the Institute.

The *second sign* which shows us the lofty and most adorable will of God is *obedience* to our Superiors. I say this to all of you, and first of all to Fr Rector and Fr Minister, who must give the example of obeying with simplicity their own Superiors; and then I say it to all the other brethren who are their subjects. We have to reflect that this is the doctrine of the Catholic Church, which teaches, and has always taught, that perfect obedience to one's own Superiors is the most certain way to know the divine will and to perfect and save ourselves. So the rashness and arrogance of our own reasonings must never be allowed to rise up and rebel; for if they did, they would be rebelling not only against the man who commanded us, but against God, who shows his will through that man. It is true that there may be some mistake or defect in the command of the Superior according to our short-sighted human way of seeing things; but there can be no defect or mistake in God's will, of which the command was a true sign. This means that in carrying out even a command that is accompanied by some error according to a human view, all the same we have to believe that in the eyes of God we shall do only what is best when we obey; and that he will make use of any error or defect on the Superior's part for his own sublime and

most wise ends, though our ignorance and limited vision cannot understand these. There is no exception to this rule, except solely if there should be any sin in what the Superior commands. Apart from this case, our intellect must keep silence in face of what is commanded, without making a judgement, without casting blame, without any kind of calculation (unless perhaps we make a representation in all submission to the Superior), and we have to give our obedience wholly, readily, simply and humbly, certain that in this way we are obeying God.

When, then, we cannot know God's will through either the first or the second of these signs, because there is no command from a Superior who tells us what to do, and again the law of God and the love of holiness does not show us what his will is in this case, then we must have recourse to the *third rule*— one of the greatest importance to Superiors, but to subjects too — whenever Superiors leave to our judgement how we should act.

The *third sign* of the divine will is *the voice of divine Providence*, which makes itself heard through external events and the overall indications of circumstances. This voice has to be received by us with the help of the calm light of our own reason aided by the light of faith. We must see things in an absolutely logical way, with no pre-existing bias and no element of fantasy, no trace of superstition, no arbitrary interpretations. In such circumstances, what God certainly wants from us is that we should do all the good which divine Providence suggests to us through external situations that we have not sought out, and do so without any mistaken preferences but always with due order. God is the essence of good: so he wants from us all the good that we are capable of; and this is what we are invited to do by his Providence — not through our own choice but according to his will. This third sign is subordinate to the second, as the second is subordinate to the first. That is, where the law of God obliges us to some course, we must follow it; and if this case does not arise, then we are to be guided by obedience; and failing an indication in either of these ways, then we have to study how to know the will of God by the light of reason and of the grace which must accompany it — so that if we are not to be deceived we have to follow the signs of Providence in external circumstances, not anticipate them.

From the first and second of the three signs described above it is clear that you all need (if you wish to heed carefully the will of God) to meditate carefully and lovingly on the Rules of the Institute which you have embraced, in that these contain in brief and show the application of the law of grace brought to us by Jesus Christ. So it is these Rules that must be obeyed equally by Superiors and by subjects.

Each one of you, then, should try to live with great trust in God, closely united with his own Superior, in whom he should see the image of God himself; and

united too among yourselves by a strong bond of love. Nothing should ever upset this, and the fulness of your love should enable you to put up with one

another's shortcomings. Your hearts should so abound in love that you should have a great zeal not only for your own spiritual profit but also for that of all your brethren, who form with you one family in Jesus Christ. So you must help to build them up spiritually by your behaviour, and co-operate in their purification and perfection, according to the spirit of the Institute and the will of Superiors.

If you act like this, the humble brother of yours, who has so much confidence in you that he writes these things with all liberty in the Lord, hopes to share in the fulness of your merits and in the prayers which you will offer up unceasingly before the throne of God from a pure and upright heart. He loves you greatly in God, and begs the Lord to grant you every blessing and an increase in grace, consolation and fortitude in your afflictions, so that your reward will be a crown of incorruptible glory.

Yours,

R.

33. To the Marchese Gustavo di Cavour in Turin

Domodossola, 19 November 1837r

... If we do not find grave matter when we go to confession, this is a mercy of the Lord for which we must thank him. But we need not be dissuaded from making our confession, for this is an act of deep humility and of sorrow for all our sins in general, which we can always detest and bring anew to the sacrament — the more so because we may always feel a certain fear on their account, since although they have been submitted to the judgement of the priest, we cannot be absolutely sure whether our disposition at the time entirely met what is required to obtain from God complete forgiveness.

On the other hand, confession, and especially Holy Communion, gives an increase of grace and spiritual strength. As regards venial sins, it is right that we should struggle against them, but with all peace of mind, since we realize that we cannot expect to conquer them all at once. There is one way in general in which we can gently make progress in this; and it is that of increasing our charity through prayer and frequent acts of love for God and our neighbour. The reason behind this is that as charity grows in us, our venial sins become fewer, almost without our noticing it, and at the same time we feel less attached to ourselves and our possessions. This is an excellent method, especially for those who are inclined to be scrupulous. Such people, through too much scrutinizing and dwelling on the slightest details, may well experience disquiet and disturbance of mind. As for 'works of supererogation', we must never transform them into duties; for if we did this we should be guilty of making the yoke of the Lord heavy by our own action. So in this matter too we have to proceed by way of the love which enlarges the heart. But since this line of thought could itself trouble the soul with the thought that we had too little love for God, the infinite Good whom we ought to love, we have to remember that this supernatural love is itself a gift of God — a gift which he grants us to a certain degree or extent. It follows that we must be content to love him to the degree that is possible for us here and now, and look for nothing more. Jesus Christ, when he commanded us to love God, did not require us to love him *infinitely*, as in fact he deserves, but to love him 'with all our heart' — which is as much as to say, with all the capacity for love that we possess. He asks of us no more than this; so we have to do what we can, and then be content and at peace, reposing in him and hoping in him. He will then do all the more in us. And as for the command to love our neighbour: where he tells us to love others as *we love ourselves*, he speaks not of *equality* but of *similarity*, and he is speaking of love as it concerns our will, and not of instinctive love. So these considerations should console us if we do not seem to love others as *much* as ourselves. It is enough if we love them with a love which is *like* the love we have for ourselves. All the same, it is a good thing (and one which causes the soul to make great

progress) if we occupy ourselves in works of charity, especially spiritual charity, which is the most excellent kind, and in promoting all good works.

As regards what you say about the difference in *kind* between the soul of a good man and a wicked one: this cannot be maintained, since the essence of being human consists in having as one's light *initial being*, and all people possess this whether they like it or not. One could say that there is a greater difference between a good man and a bad than there is between the stars and the earth — I mean a marvellous difference, even an incredible one, between them. This is suggested in the gospel by the *great gulf* between Lazarus and the rich man. And if we are talking about supernatural goodness, the distance becomes infinite; for it is certain that grace produces a *substantial* change, not merely an accidental one, as St Thomas teaches.

Your last letter was very dear to me, as was the previous one. I beg you to continue your kindness to me [in this way], and to command me as one who loves and esteems you (. . .) Continue also to recommend me to the Lord, so that I may serve him better than I do. I remain always —

Your true and affectionate servant,

ROSMINI p.

34. To Don Luigi Schlör¹⁶ in Verona

Domodossola, 21 November 1837

My dear Father and (if you will allow me), my dear brother in the Lord,

As far as I am concerned, once everything has been agreed with the Monsignor [Mgr Grasser, Bishop of Vienna]. I am quite willing for a start to be made with dear Don Oberrauch and the good man his companion of whom you speak. They and you will form a holy religious community, together laying a foundation of humility and gospel poverty. It is only on such a basis that we can build. Our Lord will do all the rest ('he who began a good work will perfect it'). The sentiments you express give me great confidence in the Lord; they are what I look for, since I am not seeking anything in the world other than the *moral virtue* that Jesus Christ, our one Master, has taught us. And I am especially encouraged to learn that you approve of and relish the booklet of the *Maxims*, which contain the whole of the Institute of Charity in germ.

I long for the time when I shall be able to embrace you and your companion and Don Antonio [Oberrauch] when I get to Vienna, and I hope that the Lord will grant me this joy — perhaps next spring. I have at once sent off a booklet entitled *Regulae Societatis a charitate nuncupatae* [Rules of the Society of Charity], addressing it to Don Antonio; but since I used a private agency, it may not yet have arrived. By following the indications of this booklet you will be able to set your little community in order, meditate together on the Rules, and start to put them into practice. As regards fixing the daily horary, it will help if you keep an eye on the Rules of Domestic Order, which contain the main principles we follow in our other houses. With these Rules and the usual horary in force in the Domodossola house (a copy of which I enclose for your information), you will be able to decide on the arrangements which best answer your circumstances there. With us the morning meditation always lasts for an hour.

I beg you to write to me about everything that seems to you relevant; and the more often you write, the better I shall be pleased. And even though I may have to delay replying to you, do not on that account stop writing. I will follow your advice, and as soon as possible I will write to the Bishop. As to your vocation, I have no doubts about this, since you have grasped the spirit of the Institute. Yes, let our study be to overcome our self-love, which is the enemy of a truly universal evangelical charity. We have to fight against it in all the ways in which it manifests itself; with God's help we must acquire *contempt of ourselves*, favouring everything which humbles us, for the love of Jesus Christ, and rejecting whatever tends to make us appear great, whether in the eyes of

¹⁶ Don Luigi Schlör was an excellent German priest who came from Vienna to Verona to join the Institute. For the same purpose Don Adalbert Schmid also came to Verona at a later date. He is the companion referred to in this letter.

the world or in our own estimation; because our dear and gentle Master 'emptied himself' .

Again, we must have great confidence in him: 'we are useless servants' — and even worse! Yet he is able to make of us what he wills, and we must be content with what he does with us, leaving ourselves in his hands with complete indifference, always content, blessing his name, concerned with only one thing: always and in all things to do his adorable will. **In** this way each of us will be constantly joyful, patient, submissive, denying ourselves, so that we may make a complete holocaust of ourselves in holy religious obedience, the mother and compendium of all the gospel virtues, since this virtue endures until death (as Christ was 'obedient unto death'). It is the salt and odour of the sacrifice which makes it fragrant and pleasing to the Lord.

I embrace you warmly in Christ as a very dear brother, and ask your prayers.

ROSMINI p.

35. To Don Francesco Puecher at San Michele

Domodossola, 3 December 1837

My dear brother in Christ,

As I wrote to you previously, one can dismiss from the First Probation all those who do not give good hopes of being suitable. As for the noviciate, we have to remember that the Institute is the Institute of Charity. So it has already undertaken to instruct in religious perfection those whom it has accepted as novices, and this must be regarded as a work of charity it is bound to carry out. Further, it is a part of the spirit of the Institute that it must persevere patiently in the charitable works it takes on. So we have to make every possible effort in charity to form the novices before we can dismiss them. Charity is *patient*; and it is to be exercised first and foremost towards those within the Institute, preferring them to those outside it. Moreover, God may wish us to acquire good members as the result of our labour and charitable care. So that if we were to send away, through our impatience and lack of charity, anyone whom we could have won over and trained in perfection, we should have committed a grave fault; we should have rejected a gift that God wished to make to the Institute: someone he wanted to form for us through our efforts. If we did this we should be harming the growth of the Institute and marring a blessing he meant for it.

It would be another matter if the young man showed ill will or a wrong disposition, or if he was in the habit of committing mortal sins and showed no purpose of amendment. In cases like these, the least reason for sending the man away would suffice. Should we be in some doubt about the case, then the young man would have to be given more and more severe tests. If he could not face these, and left of his own accord, well and good. These tests would have to be given *by stages* so as to remove any doubts we had over his case.

What we must never do is to admit to the grade of Coadjutor those about whom we have doubts, being uncertain whether they *fully* possess the spirit of the Institute.

Pray that the Holy See will give its approval to the Institute. If it does, we shall be able to do many things that are not now possible. Goodbye.

Yours in Christ,

R. p.

36. To Don G. B. Pagani in England

Calvario, 10 December 1837

My dear brother and companion in God's service. . .

I am sorry to hear that your health is not good, but it will not surprise me if the climate there at first proves somewhat harmful to you. So I should like to be clear about two things: first, whether it is indeed the climate that is causing your problems. After all, you previously suffered ill health at times even when you were in the Italian climate; so it is possible that the return of your problem has other causes. And the other thing I should like to know is whether your illness is a grave one, something that could not be overcome by a change of climate or by taking suitable precautions. I should like you to get a good doctor to look into the matter. If your condition is serious, I will at once bring you back to Italy. But unless this is really necessary I should prefer not to do that. My reason is that since our Institute has as its aim virtue and the imitation of Jesus Christ crucified, to recall you would be to take from you an opportunity that God himself has given you to practise virtue over there in a more manly and generous way, and to imitate Christ, who was never attached to places or times or actions, but wanted only to be obedient to his Father 'even unto death'. And I should be afraid that if you returned to Italy not through a directive from Superiors but through weakness in face of a little temptation, and motivated by a wish to *gain for yourself certain bodily comforts*, you would not be content, but even more upset, when you remembered Christ's words: 'Anyone who puts his hand to the plough and looks back. . . ' You would then wish you had died in the place where your mission had placed you, rather than obtaining a dispensation from it. And after all, what is death? Let us listen closely: 'Blessed are those who die in the Lord.' It is certain that anyone who is not willing to die while working for the glory of God (when he is called to this) rather than turn back 'is not fit for the kingdom of God'. And this sort of constancy is the characteristic spirit of the Institute which is named after charity, because 'love is as strong as death', and because it came to birth on Calvary and has taken Jesus Christ crucified for its device, since the power of love is shown in the death of Christ. For this reason the best-loved devotion of the Institute is *the offering of our own blood*, as the Constitutions say.

So we have to give up the claims of flesh and blood; since anyone who does not make this renunciation 'cannot be my disciple', the Master tells us. We must remember that 'what is born of the Spirit is spirit', and 'we are debtors not to flesh and blood, so as to live according to flesh and blood.' I know very well what the tempter will say to you: 'It is all very well for those who are called; but perhaps you are not called?' This is an insidious thought, one worthy of the father of lies. To discern this it is enough to ask where it comes from. Does it come from self-love? From the flesh? From the things of this world? Then it is

not from God; not from the Spirit of Christ, who always calls us to perfection. So it is a lie of Satan. He will suggest to you again: 'You have not the strength to do great things.' But Christ speaks to us in two different ways: he makes us say again and again: 'I am nothing'; but he also makes us say: 'I can do all things in him who strengthens me.' The tempter will go on: 'It is not that you shrink from the practice of virtue; it is just that you do not like this place, because it does not afford you the outward recollection that you are seeking.' You must answer him: 'Where do we read that Christ enjoined exterior recollection? He said, —Follow me— when he was among the crowds, among his enemies; he said it everywhere. He never said anything different. Recollection is to be found wherever we serve Christ. I must not invent a gospel to suit my taste or according to my prejudices.' But the tempter will not give up. He will tell you: 'Your spirit does not make progress unless it has easy opportunities for prayer, the example of a regular house, and so on.' But your reply must be: 'My spirit will make progress if I do the will of my Lord rather than my own; if for his sake I deprive myself of all consolations, even spiritual ones. I cannot put my hopes of spiritual progress in anything but the grace of Christ; and this will be granted me in all the greater abundance the more I follow his voice, carry out his mission — that mission which I have lawfully received.'

This is how you can shut the mouth of the serpent; he will no longer dare speak, because he will see that he has to do with someone who loves and puts all his hopes in his Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

In this way you will be able to make agreeable to you things which otherwise would seem to be bitter; because Christ will comfort you in a wonderful way. And so you will carry out what I had in mind when I sent you there: you will give help and support to Don Luigi [Gentili]; confirm your companions in their vocation by your words and example; forge a union of love and obedience among yourselves. These were the main duties I laid on you: console Don Luigi; teach the evangelical virtues to all, inspiring in your companions generosity, and above all perfect submission and attachment to Don Luigi, who is for all of you the mediator and interpreter of divine Providence and God's goodness. So it is all the more necessary that you should never allow yourself to show outwardly any disturbance of mind. Instead, unburden yourself to the Crucified One.

Meanwhile I await the opinion of the doctor; because it greatly concerns me to care for you — particularly if there is a danger that your health may be impaired there. Tell the others that I embrace them warmly and bless them from my heart. I pray God always to make them holy through humility, self-denial and every best gift, so that they may share in the glory of the Master whose disciples they wish to be. Goodbye.

Yours in Christ,

A. R.

37. To Don Luigi Schlör in Verona

Domodossola, 17 December 1837

Reverend Father and dear brother in the service of God,

I am very glad to learn from your welcome letter of 30 November that you have already begun to establish in Verona sound foundations for a religious house — obedience, humility, and an ordered distribution of time. I can only attribute to God's mercy such a promising beginning; and it gives me good hopes that you will continue to enjoy heavenly blessings. I regard it as a advantage that you have already read the Jesuit Rule and the precious book of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius, since very many elements of his admirable Society have been adopted and incorporated into the Institute of Charity. But at the same time there are essential differences between the two, and you will recognize what these are if you think deeply about the respective ends which they propose to their members. The end of the Institute of Charity is absolutely simple: it is goodness and moral perfection in all its extension; and this end, this perfection, consists in fully carrying out the law of the gospel. This law was summed up by our divine Master in one word: *love, charity*. That is why the Institute is called by this divine word, which expresses its aim and characterizes the school of Jesus Christ.

The aim and end of the Society of Jesus, on the other hand, is a double one: *non solum saluti et perfectioni propriarum animarum cum divine gratia vacare, sed cum eadem impense in salutem et perfectionem proximorum incumbere* [not only to seek, with the help of divine grace, the salvation and perfection of our own souls, but with the help of that grace, the salvation and perfection of our neighbour]. This difference may seem at first sight to be slight; but further thought will show that it is in fact immense. The members of the Society take on themselves such ministries as preaching and other works for their neighbour as the principal rule of their congregation; and in consequence their vocation is apostolic. But the members of the Institute of Charity are simply members of the Christian faithful who propose, in a humble and private state, to exercise charity in the most perfect way that, with divine grace, is possible for them; and they do not pass on to any apostolic ministry unless *they are called to it* by divine Providence, through the external signs which reveal to their Superiors what is the will of God. So one of the fundamental characteristics of our Institute is a humble state, patience and complete trust in divine Providence, which we wish to follow in all things and not anticipate, taking it to be an indication of God's will, and following it wherever it may lead. We carry out any ministry and take on any exercise of charity as long as the signs of the divine will are clear and reasonable, so that 'our service may be according to reason'. So the development of the Institute must be gradual, and brought about by God, not ourselves, for we *believe* firmly that God in Jesus Christ his Son lives

and reigns and governs his Church and has care of us. Our part, then, is to *sanctify ourselves* and to obey the law of God, offering ourselves continually to the Lord, and for the rest letting everything be disposed by him who is 'the shepherd and guardian of our souls'. So, pouring out our souls before God, let us be occupied in always humbling ourselves and despising the things of this world; in love and the ardent desire to become like Jesus Christ crucified; in poverty and in being despised, in meekness and the other evangelical virtues. This, then, is our way of training ourselves, and this too is our *delightful profession*. Let us remind ourselves that we are the least of men, because we are followers of Jesus Christ, who was called *novissimus virorum* [the last and least of men], and be content that everyone else should be greater than ourselves, and that 'our modesty be known to all'. And if our heart sometimes tempts us to ask Christ: 'Lord, is this the time in which you will restore the kingdom of Israel?' , we must quickly recall his answer: 'It is not for you to know the times and the moments which the Father has placed in his power!' For the rest, let us take courage, and victory will be ours.

I thank God for the news that there are also good works done by lay people to draw down his blessings on the Institute. I embrace you warmly in the Lord and commend myself most earnestly to your prayers.

Your affectionate friend and brother in Christ,

ROSMINI p.

38. To the cleric Fortunato Signini at Prior Park

Calvario, 26 December 1837

My dear companion in God's service,

I am quite pleased with the report you gave me. I do want to hear about things in detail, with nothing concealed.

The external difficulties you face in that mission do not cause me to fear; but I should like all my brethren there to show *manliness*, and not be so pusillanimous, like reeds shaken by the wind. This is the virtue of our Institute. God knows, we should not be like children clinging to our mother's apron strings! I pray him to free you from your temptations, which are really *childish*, and arise entirely from not being resolute in obedience and full of faith in the will of God. May he bring it about that you all acquire greatness of soul, and become capable of faith and sacrifices for the love of God! I ask him without ceasing to teach you all to remain united with your Superior — one heart and soul — in the name of the Lord; working eagerly and courageously together, with no speculation about the future, not letting yourselves be frightened or dismayed by anything that happens. You must give others an example of blind obedience, of *courage* and *cheerfulness*.

I wish you all, on this joyful anniversary of the birth of the Child JESUS, humility of heart and simple obedience, and I want each of you to serve God, thoroughly content with your state, and blessing him from morning till night. Embrace everyone for me in the heart of Jesus.

Yours in Christ,

A. R.

39. To Don G. B. Pagani at Prior Park

Calvario, 27 December 1837

My dear brother in Jesus Christ,

I thank the Lord for giving you relief from the physical trouble you were suffering from, and I earnestly beg him to free you also from every spiritual temptation. We have to remember that the spirit of the Institute to which God has called us is one of great *generosity*, and it was so that we might always have before our eyes our Model that God willed that the Institute should be planted on Calvary. What then? Is it possible that we should allow to be our masters those natural affections which pagans also have, instead of the affections of grace proper to Christians and priests? Let God alone be the subject of our natural affections; and when it is a question of following him in obedience and self-abnegation, let us tread everything else underfoot. The servant of Christ takes no account of father, mother, friends or the world. What are we in search of? We do not seek the *appearance* of virtue, but the solid reality of the virtues of the gospel: self-abnegation, obedience, abandonment to divine Providence, the fortitude of a true religious, greatness of soul, perseverance, patience, and so on. Surely it is clear that since God has sent you there he wishes to give you a chance to perfect yourself in all those virtues? So thank the Lord in humility of heart that he gives you so fine an opportunity to practise them.

When God loves particular souls and wishes to see them make spiritual progress, he tries them, he puts them to the test; and all this makes them know their own defects, though self-love is ill content with such knowledge. It is this loving design that God has for your soul: he has great things in mind for you. Once you were in the seminary¹⁷, where self-love found many satisfactions; he took you to San Michele where, deprived of all external signs of honour, you were able to know yourself better and to begin to detach yourself from the things of this life for the love of God. But he saw that that was not enough: he saw that your heart still harboured a human and earthly sensibility, and that this had to be replaced by the pure love of Jesus Christ. So he takes you away from your family, from your homeland, from all your acquaintances; he says to you, as he did to Abraham, 'Go from your country and your kindred. . . ' and he sends you to a country of heretics, where you do not know the language. What a grace this is! What a precious gift, if it is seen with the eyes of faith! What a pledge of love the good God gives you. There, you will be able to put off the old man; there you will learn what are your weaknesses and imperfections; there you will choose God alone instead of your parents; heaven (for which you were created) instead of your homeland; there you will be able to practise self-

¹⁷ Pagani had been Professor of Theology and Canon Law, as well as Spiritual Director, in the seminary of Novara.

denial, humility, obedience and spiritual perfection, cease to be a child and become a strong man — strong in virtue, in the ways of the spirit; you will acquire experience, knowledge of human things, greatness of soul, true liberty of spirit, and abandonment into the hands of the Providence of the Lord!

Is it possible that the devil can persuade you that your labours are wasted? Can you give ear to such a deceitful voice? I do not believe it for a moment. What more is needed if you are obedient and submissive to God in obscurity — as was Jesus Christ for thirty years to set us an example? This is the aim you must set before yourself, and no other. As for the outcome of the mission, it is enough if we commit this to God and then leave everything in his hands. Again, you accomplish something of considerable importance if you afford consolation, comfort and support to your Superior, Don Luigi; if you contribute to the sanctification of your companions, putting these same principles before them, encouraging them, strengthening them against temptation, getting them to absorb the spirit of the Institute — a spirit of *simplicity* and *calm* — and if you help them to love and respect one another, so that they are united, one in heart and soul, and have no thought but to carry out with *golden indifference* their own duties with no worry about the future. Such concern is always an insidious thought through which the devil works on our imaginations to spread his snares.

If you do all these things you will indeed be accomplishing a great deal. So, my dear brother, take courage and be cheerful! Let us all give ourselves to God with joy and generosity: we shall never have cause to regret this. Be assured that this post of yours in England is the best noviciate you could possibly make: it is a precious gift of God, to which you are bound to correspond faithfully. Goodbye. Every good wish for the coming year.

A. R.

40. To Don Francesco Puecher at San Michele

Domodossola, 2 January 1838

My dear friend and brother in the Lord,

Let me remind you that the Institute of Charity has to be kind to everyone, and to practise charity on all the occasions the Lord sends us. Again, it must show great hospitality, particularly in that spot, where it is as praiseworthy to show it as it would be cruel to refuse it. But it is especially necessary that we should be hospitable and most welcoming towards religious and priests, particularly parish priests, if we want to do good to them and to ourselves. So never neglect any opportunity to show charity and friendliness to them. We should treat them with understanding and not be put off by any defects we notice in them; for our Lord Jesus Christ did not avoid dealing with those with whom Providence brought him into contact; and he always tried to help them, never looking down on them or offending them.

I urge you then, in this New Year, to stimulate all there to renew their spirit, to grow in fervour and generosity; and to make every effort to see that the novices come out of this noviciate like iron from the fire. To tell you the truth, I wonder whether things are too comfortable there, so that when they find themselves elsewhere they may not be able to adjust themselves to harder conditions. This is an important point to keep in mind if we want (as we should) to prepare them for *anything*. Goodbye.

Yours in Christ,

R. p.

41. To Don Luigi Gentili at Prior Park

Domodossola, 14 January 1838

. . . I have received a letter from Huber which shows me that he is all upset and disturbed in mind; and he asks me to move him. This wish seems to arise from his having too much to do, from being despised, and from a lack of spiritual nourishment. Could you not give him some position which would remove these grievances? For instance, attach him more closely to yourself, so that he can directly serve you and the other brethren rather than externs? It would be a good idea to console him by speaking gently to him, treating him like a child — which indeed he is. And generally speaking, I urge you as forcefully as I can to make great efforts to attain great *meekness* and *gentleness*, as I have previously recommended you to do. If you are to act like this, you need to preserve a constant inner calm and outwardly show cheerfulness. There is nothing to equal a happy disposition for disposing us to meekness. Moreover a little holy cheerfulness raises the spirits of others, banishing melancholy, which is the great enemy of spiritual perfection. So resolve to keep all your companions happy, in the manner of St Philip [Neri] and St Francis de Sales, never showing sadness or severity. I urge you to make every effort over this: show yourself obedient.

Meanwhile I have written Huber the enclosed letter: seal it and give it to him. Let him read it on his own and study it; and then after a few days call him to you in a loving way and say to him: 'You have had a letter from Fr General — would you like to share it with me?' And if he shows it to you, explain it, and comment briefly on it in a *gentle* and compassionate way.

It is quite a while since I heard from you: make sure you give me *faithful* news of each one of the community individually — and particularly of Pagani. I have written to him, but I do not know how he has taken it. Goodbye.

Yours in Christ,

ROSMINI p.

42. To Brother Luigi Huber in England

Domodossola, the feast of the Holy Name of Jesus 1838

I thought that my beloved brother Luigi Huber loved his Lord and his dear Mother Mary most holy; but I see now that he does not love them, since he does not want to serve and obey them; because he suddenly lets himself be gripped by melancholy and upset by the slightest thing.

My dear brother, you were sent to England by God himself, through obedience to your Superiors, and it was so that you should serve Jesus Christ and help the Mission, so as to gain the souls of Protestants and the worldly for God. And are you all upset because of a little melancholy? Because of a small affliction, do you all at once turn your back on Jesus Christ? Are you unwilling to serve him any more in that country where he wishes you to do so? What is lacking to you in body or soul? Nothing. You have a loving Superior and Father in Don Luigi, to whom you can turn for instruction and encouragement; you have another Father in Don Giovanni Battista; you have loving brethren who work for Christ and are willing to suffer for love of him and to do his will; and are you alone so ill-natured and intolerant? Ah no, my dear Luigi. Instead, cheer up and thank God that you have been chosen to work for his glory. Turn to him and to our Mother Mary, and be sure that if you stand firm you will be rewarded. I await another letter from you (not like the previous one, which so grieved me), giving me consolation and assuring me that you are and wish to be a true son of Charity until death. Goodbye.

Your affectionate father in Christ,

ROSMINI p.

43. To the cleric G. B. Giacosa at San Michele

Domodossola, 24 January 1838

My dear brother,

Although I reply tardily to your letter you must not think that it was any the less welcome to me. You will be right if you put my delay down to my many commitments.

As to what you say about your studies, not many words are needed: since the present time must be devoted to your holy noviciate, to the practice of virtue and growth in holiness. Everything else is subsidiary, and you will learn from your Father Master what you are to do.

The chief matter on which I felt I ought to write to you was the doubts you experienced over the matter of *blind obedience*; and even though your Master and loving Superior tells me that this doubt no longer troubles you, still I should like to say something on this subject, my dear Giacosa.

In the first place, let me remind you of the great value of *blind obedience* when it is given for the love of Jesus Christ. This is something wholly *divine*; and it is understood only by those to whom the Holy Spirit grants his superhuman wisdom. So I want to urge you to ask for this supernatural light through intense prayer, humbling yourself before the throne of the divine Majesty and asking him in all earnestness that you may be enabled to learn the lessons given to us by Jesus Christ his Son from the cross stained with his blood.

Another way of arriving at an understanding of this treasure of blind obedience would be an intense love of our Lord Jesus Christ, since this will certainly lead us to understand his wonderful example and the words through which he taught us. These things can be grasped only by those who love him from their hearts, whereas they always have been and will remain *to the Gentiles foolishness*.

Again, another route to understanding how precious is this virtue of obedience (through which the spiritual man is always ready even to die) is that of a most firm and living faith in the teaching authority of Holy Church — the pillar and foundation of truth — and in the example of the canonized saints. For anyone who has this lively faith in the spirit and the words of his Mother, the Church, will be fully convinced, without further reasoning, that blind obedience is an act of the highest virtue and supreme merit before God. The Church has believed and taught this through the ages and in all places; and she has canonized the heroic souls who have shown this virtue. Hence anyone who takes the saints to be the truly wise people will have no doubt that what they have all without exception practised — i.e. blind obedience — is right, reasonable and holy. If any doubt should arise in his mind, a man must think himself foolish and misguided;

and he will humble himself in the light of the teachings of the saints since they, attentive to the Holy Spirit whom they possessed within them, understood very well those words of Christ: 'Whoever hears you, hears me'.

These words of our divine Master are truly an unshakeable foundation for blind obedience, since they were spoken by Christ to the Church in the person of his apostles. Furthermore, the Church speaks and works through her ministers, and especially through the Superiors of the various religious congregations. Hence there is just as much reason to obey blindly Superiors as there is to believe blindly in Christ. And just as, when we believe blindly in Christ, we abandon all other reasonings (though only to follow a most lofty reason, the only true reason), so too in obeying blindly our Superiors we renounce in one sense all our own individual reasonings; yet at the same time in another sense we are indeed following our own reason, since it is the reason of the truly obedient man, illuminated by the grace of God, which persuades him that it is most right and fitting for him to obey, without looking for any other reason than the intrinsic excellence of obedience.

But notice, my dear brother, that you are mistaken when you say in your letter that there are only two sources of commands: our own reason and the Superior. You leave out the main one: *God himself*, who speaks to us through our Superior. This authority counts for far more than our reason, which is subject to self-deceit, and indeed is deceived every time it is unwilling to obey blindly the divine will, which God makes known to us by the mouth of his minister and his representative on earth, who is our religious Superior. I say that our individual reason is always deceived when it persuades us not to obey. For when are we really deceived? When instead of looking for what is best for our true purpose — that is, the acquiring of virtue: humility, self-denial, mortification, repentance: in a word the imitation of Christ crucified — we stop short at human considerations of an entirely different order from that of the gospel virtues.

To take an example: when that famous hermit and outstanding master of perfection told his disciple to water every day a plant which had been dried up for a long time, if the disciple had disobeyed the order on the strength of being guided by his own reason, he would certainly have deceived himself and acted entirely against reason. For though it was quite true that it seemed useless and unreasonable to water the plant (as he had been told to do) if we are simply considering the aim of making it green again; yet if on the other hand we look at the other and far more sublime aim, which consists in the practice of the virtues of humility, self-denial, mortification — in a word, of obedience, which contains them all — it is clear that obeying that unreasonable command was something highly reasonable, wise and holy. This blind obedience is so pleasing to God that he has often shown his approval by miracles — as happened in the case I mentioned; because the dried-up plant, we are told, revived and flourished again because of the act of obedience.

So it is evident that every act of obedience to our Superior carried out for the love of God always includes self-denial and humility; and that these virtues are the more outstanding and admirable the more the thing commanded appears contrary to our own sense, our own judgement. And since Jesus Christ has taught us that our perfection consists in that annihilation of himself that a man accepts for love of him and in imitation of him, it is clear that there is always good reason to obey any and every command; and that this reason is so much greater than any others that they must all give way to it. For the aim of making ourselves perfect, denying ourselves for the love of Christ, is so supreme that it has no equal. It is the bright sun of reason that eclipses all the stars. For what motive for acting can be greater than that of attaining the end for which we were created, and aiming at it in the most perfect way taught us by Christ?

So the obedience which is called *blind* is in reality *enlightened*: with it we renounce all trifling and empty reasonings, simply to devote ourselves to the one true reason, the most solid and blessed reason. But such an explanation can only be understood by one who loves Jesus Christ; it can only be relished by those who are humble of heart. This light shines out only for the poor in spirit, the childlike souls who see clearly and sincerely. 'I thank thee, Father, for thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to little ones.'

So if we are to understand these treasures of wisdom and divine knowledge we have to prostrate ourselves before the throne of God's majesty and ask the Father to draw us to Christ our Lord. For there is no doubting that saying of infallible truth: 'No one can come to me unless the Father draws him.— And so if the Father, hearing the prayer which we send up to him from the depths of our heart in the name of his beloved only-begotten Son, opens the eyes of our souls and removes the cataracts with which our passions cloud our vision, then we shall not only see the inestimable worth of the gospel virtue of blind obedience, but we shall also see how poorly off our ship would be if it had for its steersman only ourselves, our own reason and will! We should see it tossed and turned by the waves of an immense, dark and turbulent sea, without ever knowing what course our poor vessel was taking. We shall see the light of our own reason, left to itself, as of no use unless to make us see the desperate situation into which we are flung. We shall see that the only star that can be a sure guide to us is not our wretched and useless human reasoning, but solely the shining, beneficent and utterly safe will of God; and that the only helmsman who is able to guide us by the light of this most happy sign is the Superior appointed over us by the Providence and mercy of God. For no matter who he may be (provided only that he does not command us to do something sinful), he is always the one sent by God, always the interpreter of the divine plan for us and the minister of the divine mercies.

We shall see all this with regard to our own salvation; but if Christ's heavenly wisdom is given to us we shall see further what good can be done through us to

our neighbour and for God's holy Church. For it is God, the Father of all men, who cares for them all; and it is Jesus Christ, the Head of that Church, who redeemed us at the price of his own blood, who has care of the whole Church. Moreover God the Father and Jesus Christ his Son chooses for the works of his glory and the good of the world and his Church only those who, in conformity with Christ, crucify themselves and die to themselves through the virtues of holy obedience, self-denial, humility and love of the cross.

It is only the one who lives by the holy obedience of the gospel who truly offers himself to Christ and the Father; and he alone is chosen according to their good pleasure to serve them in all those good works to which he has been predestined from all eternity. So we must cling more and more to holy obedience, renouncing self once for all; and we must strive after so great a grace with constant humble prayer.

This, my dear brother, is what I hope to see from you and from all our dear novices: I expect to see all of you leave the noviciate on fire with divine love, and able to set fire to the four corners of the earth. I expect you to be full of the humble wisdom of Christ, even though this is foolishness according to the blind reasonings of the world. You have to be obedient, meek, docile, enlightened, dead to the world but alive to God; glorying in knowing nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified — from whom I beg for you health and blessings now and for ever. Amen.

Your most affectionate Father General,

A. R.

44. To Brother Bartolomeo at Prior Park

Calvario, 12 February 1838

My dear brother,

I chose you out of many to go to England, hoping that you would give an example of perfect obedience to your Superior, as well as of mortification, self-denial, and the other virtues taught us by Jesus Christ. Yet you do not fulfil the hopes I had of you, or correspond with the vocation which the Lord has granted you. What are you doing, my brother? Are you going to continue to displease me like this? Are you so afraid of dying if you mortify yourself? Are you not ashamed of filling your head with fanciful notions about your health? Do you not know that the devil is always ready to use one pretext or another to turn religious away from holy obedience and mortification? Take good care over how you act, because I am not prepared to keep in the house men who are disobedient, unmortified, fickle, obstinate and the like. Such as these do no good to themselves, and cause scandal to others.

So reform yourself: eat and drink whatever your Superior provides; sleep according to his direction; do everything he gives you to do. If you act like this, as I hope you will, God will bless you. Recommend yourself to him and to our Lady; then ask your Superior to pardon your previous behaviour and give you a penance. Also ask pardon of all your companions, and begin to live a new life.

Write to me about your resolutions, so that if I have up to now suffered affliction on your account, I may from now on find consolation. May Mary bless you.

Your affectionate Superior in Christ,

A. R.

45. To an anonymous Brother

Calvario, 16 February 1838

. . .) The cause of your troubles, my dear Brother, is that you lack the humility of heart that should be the main aim of a religious man. Get rid of the cause, and your troubles will be over. But you, instead, harbour thoughts of changing your allegiance and becoming a Capuchin.

This makes you like a sick man who wants to change his room for another, hoping in this way to be cured. Or, again, you act like a man of feeble strength who, having a heavy load on his shoulders and being unable to move fast with it, says to himself; 'I know what I will do: I will take on a load four times as heavy, and so I shall be able to run.' Yet again, you resemble an invalid who, when his condition worsens, does not realize how ill he is but asks for his clothes so that he can go out for a walk; or another sick man, who becomes angry with his doctors and wants to throwaway the medicines he has been given. It is simply out of charity that I feel urged to advise you not to become a Capuchin, but to take in good part any reproaches or penances you receive, and recognize humiliation as being of the greatest benefit for your soul.

You say that as a Capuchin you would take *solemn vows*. But solemn vows do not make a religious more humble. Rather, they commit him more deeply, and make him the more blameworthy before God if he does not keep them. You say that you would be a *real religious* [if you became a Capuchin]; but you deceive yourself. It is neither the vows nor the habit that makes a genuine religious, but rather humility and the imitation of Christ. So you are not aiming at the right mark. You say that here you are neither a *religious* nor a *secular*; neither a *cleric* nor a *layman*. But I say you are mistaken: what you must seek is not the wearing of a particular habit, or being a cleric or a layperson, but rather being a *good and humble servant of God*. Anyone who does not aim at this end alone is deceiving himself.

Again, what you say is mistaken, since if you follow the counsels of Jesus Christ, you are in fact a religious. As for your not knowing whether you are a cleric or a layman, it is enough to remember that it is the tonsure that makes someone a cleric; so that if you wish you can know what is your state. You think that things may go ill with you because you *have not chosen the religious order to which God was calling you*. To say this is to see God as the cause of your troubles — whereas in truth you can and should find it in yourself. God is always present in any religious order when our will is humble and good. But you do not recognize this, and look elsewhere for the reasons why you are unhappy. You admit that in the place you are thinking of going to there are *dangers*, but you say that you know and trust that God will give you the grace to avoid them. You say that there are *less spiritual helps available*, but that you rely on the Holy Spirit to *supply for their lack*. I think it would be more true to say that, since

the Holy Spirit is never wanting to us, anyone who is found incapable of small things cannot expect to become capable of great. Again, I think it would be truer to say that we must not presume on God's mercy, or tempt him; but rather think seriously of cultivating the humble outlook which enables us to acquire grace.

The self-justifications and excuses of which your letter is full, and the *unseemly* way in which you express yourself, grieve me greatly, and I realize that correction has done you no good. One of the things you say is that it seems to you *hard that you are not allowed to go out for a few hours to take a walk after working all the week*. But in the first place this is one of the *austerities* of our Institute: and if there are not more of them, it is precisely so that everyone should be willing to accept this sort of penance, as the rule says. In the second place, it is not for the individual religious to decide what is advisable or not. Instead he must submit himself with religious mortification to the judgement of his Superior. In the third place, if your health really required that you should take a longer walk than your daily walk in the garden, all you had to do was to explain your need to your Superior; and if he found that there was a *real need*, he would certainly have given you permission, since we do not forbid what is necessary for a man's health. And in the fourth place, it has to be said that you have made the state of your *health* the reason for your shortcomings, although imagination plays a great part in this. Sometimes you bring it forward in opposition to your Superior's views, while on other occasions you want to use remedies of your own devising, refusing the humble submission you owe.

But I see very well that it would be no use were I to continue to point out to you how many signs of self-love and false judgement your letter contains. So I will limit myself to saying two things: first, that I do not believe that you would do well, in God's sight, if you were to try to become a Capuchin — I fear you would have great difficulty in being accepted, especially in view of the infirmity you say you have, and which you would have to make known — and also should you in fact enter, you would experience not benefit but harm to both body and soul; and you would probably leave very soon. And the second thing is that as far as the Institute is concerned I deem it absolutely necessary that you should change your way of thinking, recognize humbly and without excuses your faults; that you should give loyal and sincere obedience to your Superiors, and receive gratefully what they do for you, saying with the psalmist: 'It was good for me to be humbled.' But if you persist obstinately in your present frame of mind, then you should leave. For even if this would be a *misfortune* for you, to remain would not help you, and it would perhaps be bad for others.

This, then, my dear brother, is what charity, and nothing else, inspires me to write to you. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ guide you. Amen.

A. R.

46. To Don Alessio Martin¹⁸ at San Michele

Domodossola, 3 March 1838

My dear companion in the Lord's service,

Thank you for the news you give me in your letter. I will make use of it with all prudence, as is my duty, and for the sake of charity. Each of you, in the spirit of our Institute, must co-operate (within the limits of his office) in the amending not only of himself but of all his brethren too. What the Rules prescribe in this connection involves a most delicate practice of charity, of a kind quite unknown to people in the world and inconceivable to them. Moreover each of us has to exercise forbearance, hope and resignation: that is, he has to do all he can, according to God's gift, for the amendment of himself and of his companions, and for the greater progress of the works of charity undertaken by the Institute. And when he has made every possible effort (always within the sphere of his office and grade), he must preserve complete tranquillity of mind and resignation of spirit, looking to God for everything and not being disturbed if things do not go perfectly well. This is the way to peace, in which we make gentle progress towards God.

My dear Don Alessio, make every effort on your part to show in the Tamié house a great love of God, self-denial, perfect obedience, a faithful and loving observance of the Rules, order in all things, study, zeal for the salvation of souls, and all the other virtues that should adorn our state. In this way you will win great merit before God and be one of the foundation stones of that house. To do all this does not require you to go beyond the state, grade and office that fall to you, but only that you omit nothing that makes for so great an end, within the sphere of your duties, looking to God for all else with great patience and perseverance, together with constant prayer. The practice of Christian virtue and the spirit of prayer — these are truly the most powerful means of helping in that work.

Embrace for me all my beloved brethren at San Michele: I am sure that they pray for me, as I do for them daily. But still I am never tired of recommending to your charitable prayers —

Your servant in Christ,

A. R.

¹⁸ Don Alessio Martin, along with Don Flecchia and others, went in 1835 to open the Tamié house, and two years later moved to the Sagra di San Michele. From there he was before long to have gone back to Tamié, but this did not happen. (cf. E.C. 3599).

47. To Don Giuseppe Setti in Rome

Calvario, 10 March 1838

My dear brother and friend in our Lord Jesus Christ,

The reasons you gave to Father Turco¹⁹ in explanation of the difficulties you mention in your letter of the 3rd are good and sufficient, and I am not surprised that the good Father was persuaded by them. But there is a further reason to add, and in my view the most powerful of all — one that goes to the root of the whole matter. I will mention it to you, and you can bring it to bear where you think necessary.

Perfect evangelical poverty consist in possessing nothing in this world, looking solely to the Providence of our heavenly Father for all that we need. This is the practice that has been followed and blessed by the Church. The mendicant Orders were approved [by her], even though according to human calculations living on alms is an uncertain way of life. Again the Theatines were approved, though they did not even seek alms but relied on the faithful to provide them with the means to live, and the heart of the faithful is in God's hands.

Our Institute also wishes to abandon itself to Providence, and does not look for what would be a secure source of support by human standards — relying instead on God. It is not obliged to retain for ever the earthly goods that it holds *ad tempus* [for a time], but wants to be free to renounce them whenever it knows this will make for God's greater glory. It sees them as belonging to Jesus Christ crucified, and merely held provisionally by us, and in due course used in good works. If then, in spite of the care taken by the Father General to choose men of proved worth and reliability to whom to entrust temporal goods, and in spite of the sacrilege involved and the ecclesiastical penalties he would incur, someone were so disloyal as to steal the goods that belong to Christ, the Institute would not come to an end, but would simply be nearer the situation of those religious Orders which possess nothing and go begging. It is well to remember that the Institute itself is very ready to live on alms; and that this readiness is contained in the vow taken by each of its members. One of the things included in the poverty it professes is the possibility that an unfaithful member may make off with some part of its temporal possessions; and this is one more reason to make us realize that the Institute does indeed profess genuine poverty, since it has no wish to assure itself of the continued possession of the goods which it holds for a time, but instead only wants to

¹⁹ Father Turco, a Conventual Franciscan, had been chosen to examine the Rule of the Institute of Charity, especially in relation to its vow of poverty — following on the unfavourable judgement made by the Jesuit Father Zecchinelli, S.J. (cf. the account of the approval of the Institute in the *Vita di A. Rosmini*, vol. I, pp.605 et seq.).

make use of them from day to day, abandoning itself in this matter also to Providence. I will go further and say that one can see in this situation great similarity between the Institute and the body of the apostles themselves. Had Jesus Christ wished to secure safely the money which served to support the apostles, he could easily have done so. Yet to teach us that we must not go to great lengths to protect ourselves against loss, but rather put our trust in God, he let Judas hold the purse and steal from it. So why should we want to secure ourselves against the slightest possibility of having our possessions diminished, given that we have all renounced such things?

Greet everyone for me. I embrace you all warmly, and I wait to hear the verdict of Father Turco, and that everything has been presented and the matter set in motion. May God bless you abundantly.

Your brother in Christ,

R. p.

48. To Brother Luigi Huber at Prior Park

Domodossola, 16 March 1838

My dear Brother Huber,

You have consoled me by your letter - thank you. I really believed in impossible that you wanted to grieve me, and wanted also to grieve our Lady, by letting yourself be upset through vanity and being afraid of what worldly gossips might say. Remember that the Blessed Virgin wishes us to be obedient in everything and to persevere in our vocation. Have no doubts: no one can hurt you if you remain loyal to obedience and to our Lady. And since God has chosen you to live among Protestants and be a Catholic religious, he now wants you to exert yourself generously and serve him faithfully in their midst. God and our Lady will enable you to overcome all your enemies. I always remember you at Mass; pray earnestly for me, and continue to give me consolation. I bless you and all your companions.

Yours affectionately in Christ,

A. ROSMINI p.

49. To Brother Pietro Zencher at Prior Park

Domodossola, 16 March 1838

My dear brother in Christ - may God bless you abundantly. Let us thank the Lord.

I am happy about you, and you give me much consolation. Continue on the road of obedience and you can be sure that you will acquire great merit by so doing.

Thank you for your letter. Write to me again when you can, and get your letters enclosed in those of Fr Rector, to save on postage. I hope that B. has had my letter, and that he will not sadden me again with his bad behaviour. It is really unheard of that one of our brethren should be so disobedient. I hope to receive good tidings soon.

Greet and embrace everyone for me. Forgive me if my writing is bad - you know how much I have to do. God bless you and your companions. Every morning I place you in the Lord's wounds and in his heart.

Yours affectionately,

ROSMINI p.

50. To Don Angelo Rinolfi²⁰ at Prior Park

Domodossola, 16 March 1838

My dear brother in our Lord Jesus Christ, may the Lord fill you with his grace and with a most ardent charity.

Your letter of 8 February told me all about what you are doing. Thank you for the detailed account you gave. All your actions will serve to make you more holy, since they are done out of obedience, and are so many acts of the love of God. For the rest, do as you say: take no thought for the future, but leave all that to your Superiors. Be quite sure that God will bless your labours, and what is more, will reserve for you an abundant reward. Keep yourself in perfect tranquillity of mind; read and meditate on your Rules; try to savour them and absorb their spirit. In them you will find the grace of Jesus Christ, together with much consolation. Do all that is within your power, not only to strengthen yourself and confirm yourself solidly in your holy vocation, but also to give constancy (as far as this depends on you) to your companions. The enterprise you are engaged in is great - all the greater because at present it may seem small and even fruitless. So you have to put all your trust in God and obtain from him greatness of heart, generosity and courage.

I greet and bless you all, and ask for the charity of your prayers.

Your Father General,

ROSMINI p.

²⁰ Angelo Rinolfi was born at Prato-Sesia in the diocese of Novara and entered the Institute in 1834 at Calvario. He was a religious of outstanding virtue and missionary zeal, and for many years added lustre by his example and his words to the English Province, of which he was also the Administrator and Superior.

51. To Don G. B. Pagani in England

Domodossola, 16 March 1838

My dear brother in our Lord Jesus Christ. . .

Your welcome letter made me very happy, as also did your good news (which I had heard from elsewhere). Have no doubts, my dear brother: entrust yourself wholly to God, for whose honour you are there in England and for whose love you live and breathe and work. In his own good time he will give you an abundant reward, surpassing anything you can imagine, greater than you could ever desire. Through faith in this reward which without fail will be yours, in both the present life and the life to come, remain perfectly tranquil and happy, and do everything promptly and with fervour. God, whom you are serving, will enable you to overcome all your enemies, and put behind you your homeland, your family, all the world, out of love for him.

Write to me from time to time and give me detailed and positive news of yourself, of your companions and of the whole situation there. I should like the letters from my brethren in England to give me descriptions so detailed and circumstantial that, reading them, I shall feel myself in the midst of you. Meanwhile, may God bless you. With a full heart I embrace you all, and urge you to be steadfast in your holy vocation, with greatness and generosity of soul. Goodbye.

Yours most affectionately,

A. R.

52. To Don Giuseppe M. Toscani at the Sagra di San Michele**Domodossola, 18 March 1838**

My dear brother and fellow-priest in Christ,

Do not think, my dear Toscani, that you have been neglected in my heart just because you have been neglected by my pen! I always have you in mind, and every day I offer up you and all my brethren on the paten and in the chalice to the eternal Father. I constantly get news of you, and the news continues to be good, for which I heartily thank God. I hope it will not be long before I have the happy chance of embracing you. I need hardly tell you that what chiefly concerns me is that you should try to know the Institute in depth, and to meditate with love on the spirit and the letter of its Rules, so as to confirm yourself ever more immovably in your vocation. There is no knowing at present to what work God has destined you. So be on the watch so as to respond generously when he calls you: 'Here I am: speak to me Lord, for your servant is listening.'

I hear from Rome that through the divine mercy it may not be long before the Holy See solemnly approves the Institute. We have to prepare ourselves for that moment with generous hearts, and hasten the day of that blessing by much prayer and many good works.

I send warmest greetings to you and to all those with you, my dear Toscani.
Goodbye.

R. p.

53. To Don Vincenzo Cicoletti at the Sagra di San Michele

Domodossola, 20 March 1838

My dear Don Vincenzo,

I cannot tell you what pleasure you gave me by your welcome letter of 19 November last. First, I was much consoled to hear that you are confirmed in your holy vocation. Have no doubts, my dear Cicoletti, but put your trust in God; for his sake turn your back on country, family, everything in the world; live for God's glory, and you will find tranquillity, a plentiful and overflowing reward, and endless blessedness, not only in the next life but in this life too. God will take care of you in everything; with his infinite goodness he will guide you in the course of your earthly pilgrimage. And where will he lead you? To what is best, what is greatest, to all - to himself.

I was also very pleased to see how much you relish philosophy and enter into it, drawing from it inspiration rather than dryness of spirit. This is what I wanted; and it is what (I hope) will continue to happen, the more the beautiful tapestry of truth is unfolded before your eyes. I urge you to continue to give me news of your progress, both in spiritual matters and in your studies. Have great love for the Rules of the Institute; make sure you savour them all, reading them and meditating on them with the devotion which elicits from the Holy Spirit both light and unction.

Greet everyone from me by name. I embrace and bless you all. Please remember the undersigned, wretched as he is, in your prayers.

Yours affectionately,

ROSMINI p.

54. To M. Chatenay at Fonbouillan

Domodossola, 16 April 1838

My dear Sir,

I have the honour of replying at once to your letter of 7 April and to the questions you asked in it.

1. What is the end and scope of the Institute of Charity?

Answer: The end of the Institute of Charity is the sanctification of its members. That is, those who join it have no aim other than that of making a complete sacrifice to God of their own passions, particularly of self-love, renouncing their own will in order to yield entire obedience and to exercise charity under obedience.

2. What are the main points in the Rules?

Answer: These are, first, a universal charity which embraces every kind of task, even the humblest and most troublesome; second, an indifference over carrying out whatever work of charity Superiors may command, and also over whatever grade in the Society may be assigned to us; third, a degree of poverty and the expropriation of all that we possess, in so far as everything is left to the discretion of Superiors; fourth, indifference also to whatever place or company Superiors may allot to us.

3. What vows are taken in the Society?

Answer: The three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. These are perpetual, but may be annulled by the Superior General. Moreover each member must be willing to take a fourth vow with regard to missions assigned by the Supreme Pontiff, should he be chosen by Superiors to make this.

4. Can those members who are not priests go on to priestly ordination?

Answer: This depends on the judgement of Superiors, who choose for ordination those whom they judge to be suitable, after examining their vocation, mental capacity and knowledge.

Let me know if there is any way in which I can be of service to you. I have the honour to be

Your servant,

R. p.

55. To Don G. B. Pagani²¹ at Prior Park

Domodossola, 7 May 1838

My dear brother in our Lord Jesus Christ - may his Spirit be with you!

When you were sent last year to England, I informed Don Luigi [Gentili] that your stay there would be for about a year, thinking that your going there would afford you the opportunity to gain knowledge and experience which would help you in whatever works divine Providence might call on you to undertake under obedience. Next July you will have completed that year. In the meantime I have received from Rome letters which assure me that, by God's mercy, the Institute of Charity will be officially approved in the customary form used by the Church in such matters. I therefore decided to choose you as one of the first members to consecrate themselves to God perpetually in the Institute, in St Peter's in Rome, and possibly into the hands of the Pope himself. I had intended to keep these matters secret from you for the present, in order to give you the opportunity to gain merit by blind obedience and abandonment into the hands of divine Providence. But how great is my amazement and grief when I learn from your letter about the most glaring deceit through which the devil, by transforming himself into an angel of light, has ensnared you so miserably in his net! This enemy of souls has availed himself of the distress you felt in finding yourself over there so as to put an end to other temptations, only to blind and delude you with a single one greater than all the others: in other words, he has put into your mind the notion of deserting one religious Institute in order to found another! No, my dear Pagani, not only could I not in any way approve of your scheme, but I have not the slightest hesitation in asserting that what you have in mind comes not from God, but from a very different source; and that it is a most evident and deplorable deception. This at least is my deep conviction.

The motive, you say, that urges you on is the greater glory of God. But be very certain that the greater glory of God is best served by remaining faithful to your vocation, according to the words: 'Be constant in your vocation' - overcoming yourself and any repugnance you feel, and allowing yourself to be guided by Providence, waiting in patience for God to arrange matters. Can you not see clearly that, on the pretext of seeking God's greater glory, you are at

²¹ Pagani soon recognized that he had been deceived by the devil. He overcame the temptation that had misled him (cf. E.C. 3535 and 3539), and confirmed himself in his vocation. He was the first Provincial Superior in England and governed the Province in praiseworthy fashion until the death of Rosmini, to whom he at once succeeded as Superior General of the Institute. He was a man of wide knowledge, ardent piety and great charity. He wrote various small theological and ascetical works, the principal one being his *L'anima divota della SS Eucaristia* [The Soul devoted to the Most Holy Eucharist], of which many editions were published.

the point of abandoning an Institute in which you can certainly love him and honour him as much as you wish, without any limits? Whereas the only result of the act you are contemplating would be a lot of talk and perhaps even scandal. Can you doubt that everyone would start to accuse you of fickleness and inconstancy, especially because you have no real reason to make a change?

You say moreover that the aim of the Institute you have in mind is the sanctification of the clergy. This implies that you consider that the Institute of Charity does *not* tend to this, or does not do so sufficiently. But on the contrary, the dearest objective the Institute of Charity has in view is precisely the sanctification of the clergy, so that other works of charity are seen in the last analysis (if we understand their spirit and nature) as wholly aimed at the sanctification of priests. The nucleus and substance of the Institute of Charity is constituted by priests, is it not?

It may seem to you that you are doing little there in England that benefits the clergy. But why not wait patiently to see what developments divine Providence very probably intends to bring about within the Institute in due course - developments which we cannot anticipate? Do you not believe that if Providence means you to give help to the clergy, God can so dispose things and accordingly inspire the Superiors of the Institute so as to make use of you in works aimed at sanctifying the clergy? Do you doubt that, should it so please Providence, God can use the Institute to bring about an improvement in the clergy?

To envisage, as you do, a plan for a different religious body, you need first to be certain that Providence will *not* wish to make use of the Institute of Charity in order to confer on the clergy those benefits that you flatter yourself may accrue to them from some other institute. For the Institute of Charity offers itself to Providence for the good of the clergy, and God can if he so wishes make use of it for this. What makes you think that Providence will make use of the future body that you imagine, rather than the Institute of Charity? Again, are you assured of the good that you will be able to do through the setting up of a new institute? It would seem from your letter that the answer is 'no'. For you say that if God does not send others to join you, you will die peacefully in your native land. But the saints fled from their own countries - they did not seek them. And suppose you did so die: will you not be heartbroken at the moment of death to think that you have abandoned the certain for the uncertain; have thrown off the holy yoke of obedience and left the Institute to which God called you?

Moreover do you feel sure that the institute which you name *ab obsequio* rather than a *caritate* will come into being? You say you have the necessary means for it. But remember that the first requirement is that the basis of that institute should be solid and firm. Now it is my belief that some of the arrangements you envisage (and among them the *vow* to the bishops along with that to the Pope, and with the limitations you propose) *can never, never come*

about. Secondly, do you imagine that the Cardinal, or Mgr Scavini, will allow into the diocese, where the Institute of Charity is already established, *another* institute with the same aim and almost the same Constitutions? I do not think so. I think rather that if you make known what you have in mind, you will meet with their disapproval, never their support.

Alas, what an embarrassing tangle you would get yourself into if you paid heed to such a strange notion simply for lack of a little resignation and constancy! I appeal to you because of my deep conviction that you would face disaster and nothing else. I beg you instead to look within yourself and stand firm in the vocation to which you have been called, and in which (if you persevere) you will win your crown. Do not be led astray by a wild fancy: if you take a false step there will be no more time to put things right. The least of the troubles you would face would be to find yourself laughed at, and lose the support of public opinion. This would result in making it impossible for you to do the good which you *could* do in the Institute where you are now. So my advice (since you ask for it) is that you should *burn all that you have written about this new society*, and that you should think seriously before going ahead in the path you have in mind. May Jesus and Mary make you know the truth.

Yours,

R. p.

56. To Don Francesco Puecher at San Michele

Domodossola, 22 May 1838

My dear friend in our Lord Jesus Christ,

When you are giving the retreat at Novara I advise you to speak with the prudence of older men, treading carefully in delicate matters such as detachment from family. It is well to speak of this, but without any vehemence and without dwelling on the point exclusively. You need to bear in mind the words of Christ: 'I have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.' It is all the more necessary to be prudent in this way since you will be speaking in that place for the first time. Whenever you speak to a congregation for the first time it is as well to show them great respect and make it clear that *you think well of them*. To do the opposite would be to suggest a rash judgement - I say 'rash', because you are not familiar with those you are addressing: for all you know, they could all be saints. So necessary things are to be said, but with fervour, gentleness, humility, and an evident esteem for your hearers. And finally, what you say needs to be well weighed in the theological scales. Blessed Alphonsus Liguori's treatise on the duties of those in various states of life (in his *Moral Theology*) can help you here.

Goodbye. Fondest greetings to all. I look forward to further welcome letters from you.

Yours in Christ,

ROSMINI p.

57. To Don Cesare Flecchia²² at Tamié

Calvario, 27 May 1838

My dear brother in Christ - may his Holy Spirit come down on you abundantly,

I have received your letter of 17 May. I urge you to SANCTIFY yourself. And what place could be more suitable than the one you are in, where God has placed you, for giving yourself to him and imitating the virtues of JESUS CHRIST? Above all I recommend the virtues of *meekness* and *prudence*. For unfortunately you are, I fear, lacking in them! A good deal of harm is done if we have too little patience, too little gentleness and calm. Try to ensure that in all your commands, your actions and your words there is no trace of *harshness*, but only calm, gentleness, tranquil wisdom and an even temper. Direct your prayers to acquiring these virtues, and any others you feel you lack. You admit yourself that you are brusque and sharp in your manner. But, dear God, do you not realize how much damage a single ill-humoured action can cause? I can assure you that it is capable of destroying what years of patient effort have built up. So you must see how grave your defects are. You must, then, mortify yourself *interiorly*, denying your own will. This is the way to become meek.

My fondest greetings to everyone.

Yours in Christ,

A. R.

²² Cesare Flecchia, formed in Rosmini's school of perfection, became a religious of solid virtues, and after the death of his teacher was in charge of various houses of the Institute. He preserved into advanced old age a lovable simplicity and a certain austerity which reminded his brethren of the severity of primitive observance.

58. To Don Fortunato Signini²³ at Prior Park

Domodossola, 30 May 1838

My dear brother in Jesus Christ.

Although I am about to leave, I want to say something in answer to your very welcome letter. First of all, although it is true that the Constitutions say that 'complete' houses must consist of at least twelve people in the community, they also speak of 'incomplete' houses and missions. Now the English establishment is not, properly speaking, a house but a mission; and it is in mission houses that there is greater occasion to practise manly and apostolic virtues; whereas in our 'regular' houses there is greater quiet and consolation. But the end of our little Institute is not quiet and consolation but the practice of virtue: even that envisaged by St Mary Magdalen de'Pazzi, who wanted 'not to die but to suffer'; or that which St Paul speaks of: 'I could wish that I were accursed (. . .) for the sake of my brothers.' Such was the great example given to us by Jesus Christ and the apostles, on whom our gaze must always be fixed. These had no religious comforts; and we must be ready to sacrifice such things for the love of God, when this is required by charity, which 'bears all things, hopes all things, endures all things.' Oh sweet abandonment into the hands of God! Oh sweet sleep on the cross of our Saviour!

Greet personally in my name, and give my fondest regards to all and especially to Belisy who, after the Superior, is the oldest member of the mission.
Goodbye.

Yours in Christ,

ROSMINI p.

²³ Fr Signini was an edifying religious, and laboured greatly in the mission of the Institute in England.

59. To Don G. B. Loewenbruck at Chambéry

Rovereto, 20 June 1838

My dear Father,

Never be tempted as regards your vocation if at times I write to you severely: rather, grant me full liberty, and *ask* me to admonish you - that would be according to God's will. For my part I give you equal freedom as my Admonitor, and I do not know why you fail to exercise this duty. Are you afraid of hurting my self-love? Be sure that things are not like that, and that I will gladly kiss the footprints of anyone who will speak frankly to me about my defects and failings. Why, are we not intent solely on God's glory? So why should we be displeased over something that is so necessary for that glory as being able to rid ourselves of our personal defects and the effect they have in preventing the Institute from being firmly established?

As for me, I think you know that I love you, and speak to you only out of zeal for God's glory and for the sake of your own soul, and so that the Institute may make good progress. So if you are persuaded of this, how can my words cause you offence, when they are always uttered so as amend the Institute in the best way that I know? But I see from your letter that you soon realized the nature of the temptation which you experienced [i.e. to take offence], and overcame it. Thanks be to God!

At the end of this month I leave here for Calvario. When I was in Verona I found some priests who wished to enter the Institute. We shall see what comes of this. Goodbye.

Yours in Christ,

ROSMINI p.

60. To Don Emilio Belisy at Prior Park

Domodossola, 30 July 1838

My dear Belisy,

Although I am very busy giving a retreat, I do not want to delay replying to your letter of 18 July, which I received today. So I am using the time when I normally have a rest.

You tell me that you cannot make up your mind to take your vows because, among your other defects, you are bad at getting up in the mornings. But my dear Belisy I would not want you to see this as a grave fault, and it really seems to me that you are making too much of it. It would be different if you were in an Order which was dedicated to singing the Office in choir night and day, or to carrying out some other specific work. But this is not the case in our Institute, which is only concerned to seek perfection in charity. So it follows that all external and material things which are not wrong in themselves are not wrong in our Institute either, since we do not wish to burden our consciences with particular material obligations. Such things, then, are not obligatory for us, even under pain of venial sin. We fulfil such duties only out of love and spiritual zeal; and anyone who fails to do so suffers no further spiritual harm than the loss of a certain amount of merit which he could have acquired but did not. Besides, your failure to get up in time in the mornings may be due to one of two things. Either it comes of a real need that nature has of more sleep (and in such a case you could have a dispensation from your Superior - something catered for by the spirit and Rules of the Institute, which does not want to make the Lord's yoke too heavy for human infirmity to bear: it is a spirit of discretion and charity). Or on the other hand it may be that what keeps you in bed is not real need but the defect of laziness. If this were the case, then it would be a defect not only in the Institute but anywhere at all.

Now I believe, my dear Belisy, that the theological virtue of Christian hope requires that we should greatly trust in the grace of Jesus Christ: that we *can* overcome all our defects - but only as and when this is the will of God. In the meantime we have to pray and make every effort, and wait in peace of mind for the moment when the grace we need will surely come to us, once we are fully humbled and have shown patience. It is certain that whether in the Institute or not you will be anxious to put right your defects. So you are not obliged by the vows to get up at a certain time (apart from an order given in virtue of holy obedience - and this is only given for the most serious of reasons). Nor do the vows make your guilt more grave - if indeed there is any guilt, which I do not believe to be the case. Rather, the vows obtain for you greater grace from God so that you will be able to master the faults which you see in yourself. So I do not see that the fault you tell me about, or any others of the same kind to which we are all subject, can prevent you from taking your vows. Instead, these

very defects ought to persuade you to take your vows so that you can obtain from God greater strength and more abundant grace.

When you say: 'The counsels are always just counsels for everyone, until God makes his will clear to someone by a *particular and explicit command*, not just an invitation', I fully agree with you, provided that we agree on what is meant by an *explicit command*. What is needed is a *clear* command from God; but I do not believe that there is any need for an angel from on high to bring this to us, or for some other external miracle. In my view, God can also manifest his will by speaking interiorly to a man, through his mind and his heart. But if someone is not satisfied with that and shuts his ears, saying that what is in fact clear is obscure, because he is led by his passions and his earthly inclinations, no one on earth can condemn him (without a revelation); but he will be condemned at God's judgement seat. So when it comes to applying this teaching to a particular case, my dear Belisy, I refrain from ever condemning anyone; nor do I think any less of anyone. I beg you to send me the piece of writing you refer to, which seems to have caused you distress for the past five years; because I do not recall what I wrote to you, and I will explain it to you - since I do not think I have ever written anything contrary to my present views.

If you were to decide to leave the Institute I would never condemn you; rather I exhort you to remain in it and not let yourself be dismayed by your defects (in which I seem to see a deceit brought about by *amour propre* and a wish to be freed all at once from your failings.)

I exhort you, and I *advise* you to persevere in your vocation, bearing with yourself and always looking to God for great graces as long as you are humble. And I do this because I am convinced that this is the safest way for you, and the one in which you can best serve God. I am certainly not giving you a command: on the contrary, it is a plea that you will follow the *counsels* of Christ. For it is our wish to follow *freely* what Christ counsels, and to do so with all our heart - not perforce, or through some necessity, but out of love. It is true that we are weak. But what of it? Do we claim to be already perfect? No, but simply to be striving for perfection. Those who are perfect have no need of the gospel counsels; but we, who are imperfect, do need them, for they are *means* for attaining perfection. So it is not the man who is already perfect who is called to the Institute, but the one who wants to become so. 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after justice, for they shall be filled.' Our beloved Saviour has promised this.

So we have to ask ourselves: Do we want to overcome our imperfections? This is the sign that will assure us that we are on the right path. 'Am I *obliged* to this?' Why speak of obligation when love is what we are concerned with? The whole question is: do we wish to love God *without Limit*? If our heart invites us to consecrate ourselves wholly to him, why look for anything else?

Be of good heart and serve the Lord with a clear conscience and great trust in him: seek always not what is of obligation (which narrows us), but what is *perfect* (for this enlarges our heart in love freely given).

Give my fondest regards to dear Signini (I hope he received a letter from me some time ago) and all the others. I will reply to Pietro as soon as I can.
Goodbye.

Yours affectionately in Christ,

ROSMINI p.

61. To Don Angelo Rinolfi in England

Domodossola, 23 August 1838

My dear brother,

I see from your letter that you have made your retreat, and I hope that this has been of great help. My dear Angelo, we must not let ourselves be discouraged, or expect to be free of our defects all at once. We shall have them as long as we live; but right up to death we have to maintain an *unlimited* trust in God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; we have to make every effort to be men of prayer, lovers of self-denial and the cross.

Prayer and the cross - these are our weapons. We have to try to enlarge our hearts with great and noble thoughts in the Lord. As I said, our defects and failings humble us all the time, but they must never discourage us. We have to say often: 'Let God rise up, let his enemies be scattered', and other such expressions of confidence, of which the psalms are full. Stay at your post until obedience recalls you, and be certain that this is the will of God and the sure road to your sanctification.

All here send their greetings. Dear Narchialli is very ill, and to be frank I fear we may lose him. He really is an angel - pray for him; because even for angelic souls the passage from this life to the next is a very serious matter. Greet everyone for me. May Jesus and Mary bless you.

Yours in Christ,

A. R.

62. To Pietro Zencher at Prior Park

Domodossola, 23 August 1838

My dear Pietro,

I was very pleased by your letter. Have no doubts, my dear Pietro, that God is putting to your account the merit you earn by all that you do there for his glory.

I am much distressed over B., whom I shall be obliged to dismiss from the Institute if he continues to follow his own ideas. We must pray for him. I intend to write another note to him to find out whether he will see reason. But anyway, you too must pray for him, as I say, so that he may become more enlightened.

Be fervent in your devotion to our Blessed Lady, the Mother of us all and of the Institute itself. If you are devoted to her all will go well for your soul. I should like H. also to understand this, and to keep the Rules. Tell him in my name that unless he does so he will not be pleasing to our Lady - I know he feels much devotion for her. If I have told you to watch over him it is because you are his senior, and also to give you an opportunity for merit. But remember to be humble in heart, as if you were the least of all. For the rest, do your duty, and make spiritual progress.

As for the books you would like for the kitchen, the Father Superior, Don Luigi [Gentili], will bring them back for you when he returns. But before he leaves, do not fail to give him a list of the things he is to get in Italy.

Pray to God and our dear Mother for me, and I will ask the Lord to bless you and make you a true member of the Institute of Charity - i.e. a great saint. Goodbye.

Yours affectionately in Christ,

ROSMINI p.

63. To Don Cesare Flecchia at Calvario

Domodossola, 29 August 1838

My dear brother,

Do not be perturbed, but during your retreat keep your mind and soul serene, so as not to expose yourself to temptations. If they should come nevertheless, fight courageously against them using the weapons of faith and trust in God. Give up any attempt to make excuses for yourself: these spoil and impede self-knowledge and compunction of heart. Give no thought to other people's defects, but concentrate on your own - though without exaggerating them. Even if they are quite small, they are always enough to humble us and cause us sorrow.

The aim of the Spiritual Exercises is to help us to know ourselves and to strengthen us in our vocation to serve God with a generous heart. So we must not look to see whether other people have been an occasion of sin: this is no part of our purpose.

If you feel it better to refrain from saying Mass during the early days of the retreat so as to arrive at greater compunction, do this. But, I repeat, cultivate tranquillity of mind and the sweet love of God, of our Lord and of his holy Mother. Pray for

Yours,

R. p.

64. To Don Vincenzo Cicoletti at the Sagra di San Michele

Domodossola, 29 August 1838

My dear brother in our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be all honour and glory.
Amen.

I thoroughly approve of your intention to distance yourself wholly from any thought of earthly interests and family ties in order to belong to God alone. You can be quite sure that God wants our entire self: no half measures; and that everything that smacks of flesh and blood has the power to spoil our charity.

I was unable to write to you when your dear Father Master was leaving (by now I hope he is back with you), but I told him by word of mouth that in my opinion, before you go home you should seek information by letter and work out a plan of action. Then when things have been nearly concluded, go home to settle the final details. My reasons for taking this view is that if the matter has not been for the most part sorted out beforehand and a plan decided on, you will be obliged to remain at home a long time, and even then perhaps not conclude everything.

Leave things to the judgement of your Father Master: for by following his will you will also be following mine. But I earnestly beg you to make your one rule of action amid all these difficulties and trials *the greatest possible Love of God* and our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom we all wish to be consecrated. So listen to no other voice than his, but choose the course which is dictated to you by greater love for our Lord, his glory and his service. Do not look simply to avoid what is sinful: rather, wish to carry out what is *most perfect*, as did the saints, and as our Rules advise and exhort us to do. For in this consists the whole spirit of our holy Institute. This is what I hope for.

Pray to the Lord for

Your affectionate servant and brother in Christ,

ROSMINI p.

65. To the Marchese Gustavo Benso di Cavour in Turin

Domodossola, 30 August 1838

My dear Marchese,

We have to ponder deeply on our Lord's words: 'Martha, Martha, you are troubled about many things. But only one thing is necessary.' Meekness comes from the unity, the singleness of our affection, the object of which is untroubled, so that we ourselves are untroubled. You are quite right in saying that this evangelical virtue can only come from *God*; and we have to ask him for it in prayer. For only *God* can simplify our loving by his grace. We can always have this consolation: that our *God* is good and wishes to make us such gifts when we desire them and urgently ask them of him. But we shall never attain this great desire and make this insistent prayer if we do not first have a profound sense of our need. This is why *God* allows us to experience many troubles, many painful and unpleasant conflicts - so that we may understand how great is our need of his help, if we are to become meek and untroubled.

Your humble and grateful servant,

ROSMINI p.

66. To Don Francesco Puecher at the Sagra di San Michele

Domodossola, 5 September 1838

My dear brother in our Lord Jesus Christ,

It is necessary to make C. understand much better that the spirit of our Institute calls for a heart full of the love of God and our neighbour, and that each one of us must want to spend everything - even the whole world if we possessed it - in charity. Get him to see how narrow his heart is, and how petty; and make him understand that with such an attitude he could never succeed as a member of the Institute of Charity, which calls for a *most generous spirit*. If he repents, you must see that he makes a retreat of at least three days, and during it he is to meditate on the generous spirit that must animate each of us. If he does not make a fresh start, there is nothing for it but to send him away. But in this case, send him first to Calvario: I want to speak to him. Goodbye.

Yours in Christ,

ROSMINI p.

67. To Don Antonio Gasperini at Rovereto

Domodossola. 16 September 1838

My dear Don Antonio,

Tell the young lady Stedile²⁴ that the convent in which I am offering her a place is not an enclosed one. It belongs to the Institute of Providence, which has as its principal aim the exercise of charity towards others, especially through the education of girls. It is an Institute of great value to anyone who wants to correspond worthily with this vocation. The Sisters of Providence are sent out from the central house, in twos and threes, to various villages and towns in order to run schools in houses provided for them. In the holidays they return each year to the central house to make a retreat and renew their spirit. When the holidays are over they are again sent to one or other of the small establishments - not always to the one to which they were assigned in the previous year.

The members of this Institute must have great charity and a zeal to be of service to girls, especially as regards their spiritual needs; a great love of poverty is also required, for this is one of the things most strongly urged on these Sisters, together with a spirit of complete abandonment to divine Providence.

Get the young lady to see all these things, so that she may examine and develop her vocation, and in due course be able to come, with her mind made up and complete trust in God. I have no other place to which I can send her.

I am dictating this letter from my bed, to which a feverish cold has sent me. Pray for me and give my greetings to my friends.

Your affectionate friend,

A. ROSMINI p.

²⁴ The signorina Stedile was a girl of very good reputation from Rovereto who wished to become a nun. She had approached Rosmini, asking him to find her a suitable convent.

68. To Don Giuseppe Roberto Setti in Rome

Calvario, 6 October 1838

My dear friend and brother in Jesus Christ,

As regards the religious habit, the Jesuits have no special habit of their own, except out of mere custom; and the missionaries of St Vincent de Paul wear the ordinary ecclesiastical dress. If we were to introduce any external distinction in our Institute between ourselves and the secular clergy, this would be contrary to our spirit, which can be summed up in these words: we want to be like religious as regards our interior spirit, and like the secular clergy as regards externals. Our dress is that of the Roman secular clergy. By fraternizing with religious in what concerns the spiritual life, and with secular priests over external matters, we are in a position to be useful to both classes of clergy, as is required by the universal charity we profess. So let us not speak of introducing a special habit or any other distinguishing feature.

Your brother in Christ,

R. p.

69. To Don Paolo della Via, a Barnabite in Milan

Stresa, 13 October 1838

Reverend Sir,

I am entirely of your opinion: I do not think it advisable for a teacher of religion to combine this with the teaching of philosophy, and set himself both to combat unbelief and to be an apologist for religion. Rather, as you say, religion should be taught on its own, and people be brought both to love and to live it. The other arrangement sometimes does nothing but sow doubts in students, leaving minds uncertain and hearts cold. What we need to do instead is to cultivate the faith in young minds, making it warm and effective in action by enkindling in them the fire of charity. For this to happen, I think it helps greatly if ideas are carefully linked one with another, and religion is presented as a great whole, showing the consistency of its mysteries and the strict though hidden connection between what we believe and how we act.

With this method of approach there will be opportunities from time to time to rebut the main errors of our day, and to forearm young people against being misled by bogus clever minds. I regard it as very necessary to warn the young in advance of all the various types of scandal, and especially that given by the misconduct of certain of the clergy, so that they may learn to distinguish between what is divine and what is human, and will not vacillate in their faith because they see or hear of the infidelities of ministers of the Lord. This is one of the main sources of unbelief today. 'Because priests act amiss, therefore the religion they teach is false.' That is the current sophism.

I regard it as equally necessary to give young people a great vision of divine Providence, and to induce in them great respect for all God's workings, without ever taking scandal from anything that happens.

I do not know of any book which would answer this need and could serve as a textbook. Rather, I would encourage you to write one yourself, giving it the careful study that such an important work calls for. It would be impossible to expound in a letter everything that I might think it necessary to say in this connection; but you will find the bulk of my thinking in a catechetical work of mine published by Pogliani under the title, *Catechetics, Various Works*, and in Vol. I of my *Philosophical Pamphlets*. Also, by the same publisher, *A Catechism arranged according to the Order of Ideas*. Again, while I was Archpriest of Rovereto I gave the people some catechetical talks which, I think, are in the style which needs to be used in expounding the truths of the faith.

Thank you for keeping me in mind: do pray earnestly for me to the Lord, in whom I embrace you with fraternal affection.

Your humble servant in Christ,
ROSMINI p.

70. To Cesare Cantu in Milan

Domodossola, 22 October 1838

My dear Signor Cesare,

This letter ought to have reached you at the end of August according to my promise; but various events, including my continued illness, intervened to prevent me from writing to you.

I want to thank you very sincerely for the precious gift of the fine *Introduction* to your *Universal History*. I have read it and find it comes up to my expectations. Indeed it is more than I expected, with its ample and profound treatment of many matters. It mirrors a great mind and a kind heart, appropriate in an historian. My reading of it has won me over to the agreeable labour of reading also the *History* which follows, even though such exertion is against the grain at the moment, when I lack the time and the strength to read a number of other fine works and am strictly ordered to limit my reading to what is absolutely necessary each day. Yet I feel compelled to obey the attraction which your *Introduction* exerted on me. It would be all very well if this were the only consequence of my yielding to your kind invitation! You do not look for unmixed praise from me, but you ask for my verdict, my opinion. It would be easy enough for me to supply praise; but it is more difficult to give you comments of a reasonable, moderate and useful nature - which would not be so if they were not new. How can I say anything that you have not perhaps already heard from others: things already pondered and discussed? When things that are important and beautiful first appear, there will never be lacking people to censure them; and I cannot say whether your great work has been greeted by the public more with praise or with criticism. At all events, if I speak of religion I shall perhaps be saying something that has *not* already been said by others. Although religion is the most important subject of all, it is the one on which men of letters have least to say. Your *Introduction* is religious from start to finish; and its author is never ashamed to make public and dignified profession of being a Christian. All the more then, I can speak freely, sure that what I shall say will not be offensive to you but rather agreeable, even though it may seem excessively hair-splitting and scrupulous.

What then it occurs to me to remark is that the attitudes and expressions that are sometimes to be found in the *Introduction* when you speak of Christianity seem to me to smack of and be similar to what we see in many modern writers, especially French authors: they speak in a purely human way about the Christian religion, and as it were re-fashion it according to their own ideas. They tend to avoid all that is supernatural, failing to mention it, even if they do not deny it; they say nothing about miracles or mysteries, or even divine grace - which is properly speaking the very life of our faith. They confuse the true regeneration of man, which comes about in an instant by Christ's action in baptism, with what they erroneously call 'regeneration'- meaning only the national or social civilization which comes in the course of the centuries.

I will give you a single example of what I mean. On p.28 of the *Introduction* you very rightly say that: 'Christianity raised up history and made it universal, since in proclaiming the unity of God it proclaimed also that of the human race; and by teaching us to invoke *Our Father* it made us recognize that we are all brothers.' Nothing could be more true than the main idea here. All the same I would say that there would be nothing especially remarkable if Christianity merely proclaimed the unity of God. This unity was made known from the beginning of the world; but this did not suffice to keep it from corruption. This same ancient tradition concerning the unity of God was preserved even among the Tahitians, the adorers of the Great Spirit; but this did not prevent those people from regressing to a state of savagery. The same teaching about God's unity was announced by the wisest men of India, of Greece and of Rome. Mohammed stated it even more forcibly (it could be said) than Christ - since he denied that there was a Trinity of Persons. Yet this agreement over God's unity so strongly manifested did not ennoble mankind: it did nothing comparable with what Christianity brought about.

The true and fruitful teaching of the religion of the Saviour of the world is that of the Trinity, and consequently of the Incarnation. But it would have been futile merely to announce such teachings if the infinite power of grace had not kindled the light of faith in the souls of the baptized. This was the secret instrument that was lacking to Mohammed, to Confucius, to Plato, to all those wise men in the world whom Christ called *latrones* [mercenaries or robbers]. But this instrument was possessed by the Incarnate Word. He alone had the power to place on men's lips the *Our Father* - words that could not be pronounced in the absence of the doctrine of the Trinity, since the word 'Father' implies the whole mystery. God could not receive the name of 'Father' if he did not have a Son who was God. Here, as in other passages, the word 'grace' would have expressed the entire truth of the author's thought, as where we read: 'the poor, the weak, the unknown, the calumniated, spread the kingdom of God with authority, by instruction, ceremonies and example.' (p.66). But here is notable that there is no mention of the principal means by which Christianity was propagated - namely, *miracles*. As St Augustine observed, had these been absent, the rapid diffusion of Christian truth would itself have been an even greater miracle.

My dear Signor Cantu, I think I have now given you proof of the esteem in which I hold you, and the sincere affection I have for you by sending you these observations on your great undertaking. Take such account of them as your wisdom suggests. I am sure that the things I have said will not take away from the achievement which your work represents, as a notable monument of Italian literature - I would dare to say that it is unique of its kind.

Do please continue to give me your valued friendship, and greet for me our venerable Don Alessandro.

Your friend and servant,
ROSMINI p.

71. To Don Luigi Gentili at Prior Park

Domodossola, 10 November 1838

My dear companion in the school of holiness,

Our Institute is not well known, and it is thought to be just like the other religious Orders. But in fact it has a different end. We wish *in all simplicity* to carry out the works of charity that Providence sends us; and one of the Rules in our Constitutions is that of constantly persevering in the works we have begun. We do not look on the Prior Park establishment as someone else's house but as one of our own: as the field which God has given us to till. So much so that unless we are sent away, or we see that we are no longer of any use, we will not abandon it. Rather we will use all our energies to cultivate it. Besides, we see in the wishes of the bishops one of the principal signs of God's will; so that for our part we always identify ourselves with those desires. But we will do this *without binding ties*, simply out of a spirit of piety and charity.

For us the only reasons for making changes would be the good of souls and the *training* of our own members. If we do not educate them according to what is laid down in the Constitutions they will never take root. So never raise objections to me over this point.

It is my absolute wish that Signini should *in all tranquillity* complete his course of theological studies; and I do not see how he can do this in England while burdened with so many occupations. It is one of the greatest dangers, and something quite contrary to our spirit, which requires that we must not *set subjects to work before they are fully formed*. I have the same fear over the noviciate that we must open over there: I am afraid that it might be a noviciate only in name, in which the Rules and Constitutions would not be observed, and from which the novices might be assigned to external works, having been taken from the noviciate before the proper time. So, my dear Luigi, we must go slowly in everything, keeping to what is laid down, if we want to lay firm foundations.

Your foremost duty is to pray ceaselessly for your companions and yourself, and to keep a most diligent and careful watch over their precious souls. This I urge on you most strongly.

The penance you ask me for is this: you are to learn by heart the *Common Rules of Superiors* - three each week until you reach the end; and you will recite them to Pagani. I embrace and bless you all.

Yours in Christ,

ROSMINI p.

72. To Don Giacomo Molinari at DomodossolaStresa, 25 December 1838²⁵

My dear friend and brother in Christ,

How good is the Child Jesus! On this very day of his birth he sends me the wonderful news of the approval of our Institute as a Congregation, with the privileges of Regulars, issued in Rome on the 20th of this month. So let us rejoice doubly in the Lord, who is born among us and who at the same time brings about the birth of our little Institute. Convey this consoling news to all our dear brethren, so that all may at once thank the divine mercy. Later, I shall write at greater length to say what acts of thankfulness the whole Institute is to make. Give my warmest greetings to all, in the infinite love of our Lord.

Yours affectionately in Christ,

A. R. p.

²⁵ On this same Christmas Day of 1838 Rosmini also communicated the news of the apostolic approval of the Institute to Cardinal Morozzo; and on the 3rd of January following, to Bishop Sardagna and Cardinal Tadini. (cf. E.C. 3669, 3685 and 3686).

73. To His Eminence Cardinal Castracane in Rome

Stresa, 26 December 1838

Your Eminence,

The letter in which Your Eminence was good enough to communicate to me the outcome of the meeting of the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Regulars on the 20th of this month reached me with unusual speed on Christmas Day itself, and I took it as a present from the infant Jesus.

I cannot find words adequate to thank you for the kindness and constant zeal with which you have brought to a happy conclusion a cause which did not lack opponents. As long as the Lord may be pleased to maintain the Institute of Charity in the Church, it will unfailingly remember you with continued gratitude as an outstanding benefactor.

As for myself, I can offer you nothing in exchange for so many benefits but my poor prayers; but with these I will never cease to beseech God to grant you an abundance of graces. So too my companions will pray for you daily - as they have already begun to do.

I welcome this occasion to express to Your Eminence my most sincere good wishes for every blessing as the New Year begins. With deepest esteem, devotion and gratitude, I have the honour to remain

Your humble servant,

A. R.

74. To the Rectors of the Institute of Charity

Stresa, 28 December 1838

To all the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ who belong to the Institute of Charity, the Provost General wishes the grace of our Saviour. *The Lord heard the cry of the poor.*

The Lord has heard the prayers of those who with humble and fervent heart appealed to him, in the spirit of the letters sent to the Rectors of our houses on 20 May 1837 and 3 February 1838. On Christmas Day itself I received a letter from Cardinal Castracane in which he told me that the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Regulars, meeting in Rome on the 20th of this month, had given full approval to our small Institute as a Congregation, with the principal privileges of the religious Orders, notably that of exemption from episcopal jurisdiction in all matters of internal discipline and the government of the Institute.

On receiving this letter I could only exclaim in the depths of my heart: *The goodness and kindness of God our Saviour has appeared!* I took the joyful news which had reached me on that day as a present from the infant Jesus, whose tender love wished to redouble for us the happiness which his birth was spreading in the hearts of all the faithful.

In announcing this joyful news and the circumstances surrounding it, so as to move you to respond with most tender love to the God who for love of us took on our humanity in the body of a baby, I want to draw your attention to another happy coincidence connected with the date of the approval. Since all events great and small are directed by the Providence of our heavenly Father and not by mere chance, it is only right that we should consider them as so many expressions of the same divine Providence, as it teaches us and shows us how to direct the affections of our hearts towards heavenly things.

You all know that when the Institute had just begun its existence about eleven years ago, two of our brethren were called from this world: the priest Baron Giulio Todeschi, and Felice Moschini, whose life has been published. As all of us who knew them can testify, these were two men of great purity of conscience and immense generosity; they had a deep attachment to their holy vocation to the Institute in which they lived and died. Now it pleased the Lord that the Cardinals gave their approval to our Institute on the very day on which was celebrated in Rome the feast of the glorious martyr S. Giulio, and in this diocese of Novara (which was the cradle of the Institute) the feast of the great Pope and martyr S. Felice. I would almost say that by this coincidence God was pleased to let us know that the two first fruits of our Society were acceptable to him, and that our two dear companions do not cease to pray for our Institute and theirs, through the intercession of the glorious martyrs,

their patrons, whose name they bore on earth. Let us all make an effort, then, to imitate the virtues of those who were the first to pass from our midst and receive their reward, as we sincerely hope, and let us never forget that the Institute expects from its sons the greatness of heart and generosity of the martyrs.

But the first thing what we must all do now is to thank God for his mercy and goodness which, through the authoritative verdict of the Apostolic See, has made it known to us that he has truly called us to the Institute in which we are professed, and that he really wishes to see it live in the Church for his own inscrutable reasons. Nor have we been mistaken in our belief so far that this Institute of ours is the result not of the will of man but of the will of our Creator and Saviour. So, apart from the personal thanksgiving which will be made from his heart by each member of the Institute who is worthy of his vocation, the entire Institute will not fail to offer thanks to God, while at the same time asking him to be so good as to increase in our hearts the spirit of our holy and sublime vocation. For this reason I consider it fitting to prescribe that all the pious exercises ordered in the letter of 3 February 1838 to implore from God the success of the cause in Rome for our approval be continued throughout the Institute for the next three years, starting from the date of the approval, the 20th of this month, through to 20 December 1841. The Rectors of all the houses meanwhile are to re-read carefully the letter I mentioned and put its prescriptions into practice exactly, beginning with a triduum of thanksgiving in all the churches of the Institute, and attending to all the other directives in the letter, with one modification: where before the prayer to the Holy Spirit was to be used in the Mass, now instead we will say the prayer assigned for thanksgiving.

For the rest, my dear brethren, we must all from now on begin a new sort of life: this means a spiritual renewal, calling for a greater attachment to the holy Institute to which God has called us, a complete detachment from the things of this world and from ourselves. I wish to make it known to you all that the time is near when we shall make a personal offering of ourselves to our eternal Lord by irrevocable vows. This is a thought that must fill the hearts of true lovers of the Institute and of the cross of Jesus Christ, with unutterable consolation. So you must all prepare yourselves for this great and joyful event so that all be worthy of it; and so that the Superiors, who will have to choose from among you those who are properly disposed, will not think in terms of who to choose now and who to postpone, but will decide that all of you are worthy to be included among those who will make the first vows and thus become the foundation stones of our Institute.

So that you may have the necessary time to prepare your souls for so noble and delightful a sacrifice, I have already decided on the day when the three vows of Coadjutors of our Institute are first to be taken by those who are chosen (and all of you should wish to be of this number). It will be the 25th of March,

the feast of the Annunciation to the Blessed Virgin Mary, our Mother — the day on which the Word took flesh in her most chaste womb. So on that same day let our Institute too be conceived, as it were, in that same womb; and each one will be able to say, as he takes his vows, *Behold, I am the servant of the Lord: let it be done to me according to your word*. If this offering is made with wholehearted sincerity, the Creator and Saviour will come down by the power of the Holy Spirit into the soul that offers itself to God.

But in order that your preparation may be all the more perfect, let each one meditate profoundly on the Rules of the Institute, and recognize and hear in them the living word of Christ, who must ever dwell in him and work in all he does. Only in this way shall we be able to thank the Lord worthily, and respond to the new call which he has been good enough to address to his servants through the word of his Vicar on earth. God will then accept our thanksgiving, which will become an effective plea for new graces. Finally, may I ask all of you who in this time of fervour are preparing to equip your souls with new weapons for the Lord's battles, not to forget in your prayers

Your lowly servant and unworthy brother,

A. ROSMINI p.

75. To Don Luigi Gentili²⁶, Rector, at Prior Park

Stresa, 29 December 1838

My dear brother in our Lord: may his Holy Spirit be with you. Amen.

You are to take great care to prepare those who are to take their vows, and ensure that they become more holy. Each is to make a retreat of one month. As for those who are not free to leave their duties, they must continue to perform these in as holy a way as possible. But any time they have over is to be given to spiritual exercises.

Examine and test all of them as regards their spirit of detachment from the things of this world, since they must not only consecrate to God everything they have (so as to possess nothing of their own, not even a shirt), but must also be ready to live on food they have begged for the love of God (as our vow of poverty requires). So too test them all over their indifference to place. For our men must be ready to go anywhere in the world at the bidding of obedience. After taking their vows they will be sent wherever the glory of God may require.

I await a brief reply from you. God bless you.

Your affectionate brother in Christ,

A. ROSMINI

²⁶ This letter is not to be found in E.C., but the original is kept in the archives at Stresa.

76. To Don G. B. Loewenbruck

Stresa, 11 January 1839

My dear Father,

Your letter caused me great distress. You gave me various dates on which letters could reach you, and you told me that I should write to Chambéry after 18 December, so I have waited to make sure you receive this.

In the meantime perhaps you have received the news I sent you in my two letters, about the approval which the Holy See has given to our Institute, and about the feast of the Annunciation as the date for taking the first vows by all whom the Lord has called to this work and who have remained faithful to their vocation. Is it possible then that you do not wish to be at Calvario together with your brethren on that happy occasion — you who were my first companion? I cannot believe that now, after eleven years, when it is a matter of in some measure reaping the fruit of our labours, you want to leave untouched the wages that the Father of the family is giving us! Can it be that you of all people will be the only one missing when thirty of the brethren gather at Monte Calvario (where we spent so much time together) to consecrate themselves to God? I cannot believe this, and the very thought of it makes my heart bleed.

Ah, my dear brother, take good care that your imagination does not deceive you again now, and that when you come to face the judgement of the Lord who calls you to be one of the foundation stones of the new building which he, through the voice of his Vicar on earth, is founding in the Church, you do not have to repent greatly of having turned your back on that way to salvation which he is opening before you with such great goodness and inexhaustible mercy! To speak more frankly, my dear Father: the steps you want to take do not lead just to the preaching of Lenten sermons. Rather, they would put you on the way to leaving the Institute. To go to France without the express permission of your Superior, and to abandon on your own initiative the rectorship of the Tamié house — these things show clearly that the devil is driving you to leave the Institute in which he can see that you would find the safe guidance which you need for your eternal salvation.

My dear brother, I beg and implore you not to allow yourself to be deceived by any thoughts that tend to take you away from the Institute and from us your brethren, who love you sincerely; and I entreat you in this way for the good of your soul. If you will come to Calvario — whence as far as I am concerned I will not let you leave again so easily — you will ensure your eternal salvation. Believe me, I do not say this without sure grounds; and perhaps God himself is saying this to you. So do what you can to cancel the Lenten preaching. The approval from the Holy See, and the ceremony of the vows give you a way to do this without incurring blame, since these things are quite exceptional and you could

not have foreseen them. I beg you to do this; and if you agree, that will provide me with the assurance that you have overcome the temptation of the enemy. Come and join us as soon as you can. We await you with open arms, with the most sincere and affectionate charity.

Write me at least a few lines as soon as you receive this, to console me in my present sadness. Goodbye.

Your affectionate brother,

ROSMINI p.

77. To Don G. B. Pagani in England

Stresa, the feast of the Holy Name of Jesus, 1839

My dear brother and companion in our Lord Jesus Christ,

Don Luigi really made a mistake in writing that letter to the Bishop²⁷. But in this matter as in all others we must be guided in our judgement by the beautiful principle of Christian charity: we have to interpret everything our neighbour does in the most favourable possible way. And if a religious must observe this maxim with regard to everyone in general, it is all the more necessary that he should do so with his Superiors — since they, believe me, have to handle a difficult ministry. They are only men: so on the one hand we must greatly sympathize with their problems; and on the other, we have to interpret with great kindness and charity all that they do, allowing them the benefit of the doubt. This is what the Spirit of God, a Spirit of union and humility, suggests to every subject.

For the rest, keep your gaze firmly fixed on the adorable Providence of our Lord and Creator; and I am sure that if you do this, nothing will dismay you. It is enough to remember that what God wants is that we should become more perfect and grow in virtue. It is solely for this reason that he puts us in difficult situations. Believe me, my dear Father (and what I say to you I say to all the brethren), it may well be that God sees that the difficulties and conflicts you meet with, and which get in the way of your recollection, lead you to acquire more merit and virtue in his sight than would be the case if you were to live the peaceful life of a hermit, without any stimulus to exercise your spirit in battling for God's holy cause. *Only he who righteously fights will be crowned*. Our Institute has need of spiritual warriors — that is the truth of the matter. God will not fail us: of this we can be certain; and if *God is for us, who can be against us?*

May the name of Jesus be your strength and consolation.

Yours,

ROSMINI

²⁷ With regard to the letter of Gentili mentioned here, cf. E.C. 5713.

78. To Don Angelo Rinolfi in England

Stresa, 20 January 1839

My very dear Angelo, my beloved companion in God's service,

When I hear you declare your unshakeable firmness in your vocation to the Institute, it fills my heart with joy. God will crown your manly perseverance. Truly, those who think they have entered the Institute simply for a restful time deceive themselves. For we are soldiers: the Institute is a battlefield in which our glorious aim is to conquer so as to obtain solid and manly virtue, and to imitate him who said that he found no peace except in giving his life on the cross. So, *Fear not, little flock: I have overcome the world.* What dear and consoling words are these from our Captain! Who will be so poor-spirited as to withdraw from following him?

Yours affectionately,

A. R.

79. To Don Emilio Belisy in England

Stresa, 20 January 1839

My dear companion in the love and service of Jesus Christ,

Your letters are very dear to me, especially when I find them as full of information as were the last two. Do not expect me to reply point by point: that is not necessary, and I am sure you do not look for it. But be sure that, as far as I can, I try to profit by all the news and all the insights I receive, meditating carefully on everything in the presence of God. In your situation there, all of you must try to remain united in the Lord, and rally round Don Pagani. He will supply for anything that your Superior is unable to do because of his absence²⁸. I beg you all to show charity and a solid and manly virtue: God will not fail to help you if you put your hopes in him, praying humbly to him from your hearts. In this way you will emerge victorious from the trials and the spiritual conflict, and you will be like the wise and just man of whom scripture says: *He will test the good and evil that is in men.*

At the end of your letter you rightly remark that it is not easy to reconcile humility and religious submission with writing at length and in detail. Unfortunately the imagination comes into play, and this commonly ministers to our passions, especially our self-love. So it tends to rob us of our peace of mind, the peace where humility and simple obedience are at home; and there is no virtue more dear in the eyes of the Lord than humility. Have recourse to God, therefore, since you have to send such detailed reports; and always make interior acts of humility, resignation and mortification, in order not to lose the poverty of spirit which is the subject of the first of the Beatitudes. Goodbye.

Yours affectionately,

R.

²⁸ Gentili had been sent by Mgr Baines to Spettisbury to take care of a convent of Augustinian nuns and to be of service to the small number of Catholics in that area. (cf. *La Vita di L. Gentili* written by G. B. Pagani, pp.214, 215, and 'Luigi Gentili, a Sower for the Second Spring' by Fr C. R. Leetham, pp.94, 95).

80. To Don G. B. Loewenbruck at Tamié

Stresa, 29 January 1839

My dear Father,

I was hoping to receive a consoling letter from you; but the one I have just received, dated the 26th, only causes me further grief. You tell me that there were many urgent reasons which called you to France; but not only do you not tell me what they are: you also keep from me the name of the place in France to which you intend to take yourself *for some months* — perhaps to get away from the nuisance of receiving my letters. Still, if the motives from which you are acting are spiritual ones, I do not know how you can fail to be afraid that God will call you to account over your vocation. I believe with a moral certainty that God has called you to the Institute of Charity; that he has opened up for you this secure refuge for the salvation of your soul. But you close your ears to my words, which may come from God, and you are intent on distancing yourself more and more, listening to the counsels of your own heart rather than to the urgent advice of the friend whom God himself has given you. Do you think that elsewhere you will find people more loving, or more faithful, or in whom you can place greater trust, than your companions in the Institute of Charity? It is hardly likely. If only you do not abandon us, we are your companions for life; others, by contrast, will only be so for a short while. Whether you take your vows or not, I am certain that Calvario is the best place for the health of your soul — the place where you will experience fewer temptations; where your imagination will deceive you less than it would do in France; and where faithful and loving counsellors will tell you the truth. So I again invite you, and beg you from the depths of my heart, to give up this idea of going to France, and cancel the engagement you have made there. Instead, come and pour out to me your problems and your worries, abiding by the judgement we shall reach together once we have thoroughly examined the matter, as to whether or not you should take your vows along with the others. I see only too clearly that whether or not you make a good death may depend on whether you accept my advice or not. Be sure that what moves me is simply and solely my concern for your soul; and that at all events the sincerity of my love will become clear to you one day when we both appear before God's judgement. Bonnefois²⁹ is certainly not capable of bringing to a conclusion the affairs of the Tamié house³⁰ by returning what was handed over in the inventory. . . and are you going to desert me like this, leaving me in such an embarrassing situation? Have you the heart to leave your post so precipitately, like a fugitive? It is true that you speak of returning: but you give me no idea of when that may be; nor do you undertake to wind things up at

²⁹ This is how the name appears in E.C.; but in the personal notes kept in the Rosminian archives it is written *Bonnefoy*.

³⁰ For an account of how the Tamié house was closed, cf. the *Vita di A. Rosmini*, vol. 11, pp.555-559.

Tamié in a suitably honourable way on your return. Lastly, your previous way of acting offers me no guarantee that you will keep your word. For how can I rely on the word of someone who treats me as you do?

The only thing that inclines me not to abandon all hope is the thought that you may be really ill. And this, while it grieves me, also leads me to hope that it is your ill-health that has brought about the conduct which I find so distressing. May the Holy Spirit lend power to my words and make you realize that they are not deceptive. What a consolation it would be if, after you had recovered somewhat from whatever ails you, I could all of a sudden embrace you at Monte Calvario!

In the meantime I will offer up Mass daily for you. Goodbye.

Yours in Christ,

ROSMINI p.

81. To Don Giacomo Molinari at Domodossola

Stresa, 29 January 1839

My dear brother and companion in the service of God,

I must admonish you to make a point from now on of keeping in good order your manuscripts, papers, books and other belongings, and also to see to the cleanliness and good order of your room, which should show a good example to all the others.

The more I study the world, the more I realize that if we intend to make ourselves useful and show forth great charity, we must give a shining example of both order and cleanliness.

My warm regards to dear Narchialli³¹ and to all my brethren in the Heart of Jesus, among whom I include Bianchi. Goodbye.

Yours affectionately in Christ,

ROSMINI p.

³¹ As to Narchialli, cf. the note to Letter 96 of vol. 11 (English trans.).

82. To Don Emilio Belisy in England

Stresa, 22 February 1839

My dear Emilio,

It is my view that you should take your vows, since I am fully convinced that by doing so you will please God. Out of this conviction I have included your name in the decree which I am sending to your Superior, dear Don Luigi [Gentili], and which contains the list of those who are to take vows there.

As you know, your main spiritual enemies are the subtle workings of your mind, and especially your imagination. Try to overcome these things by prayer and by generous acts of the will, repeated many times over. Such acts, and our constant pleadings with God, together with heartfelt longings, have great power to obtain for us the grace and strength we need all through our earthly pilgrimage.

I do not object to *reasoning*, but I must point out that there are *primary* reasons based on absolute truth; and *secondary* reasonings, which have only a partial and relative truth. Now, in all our views and actions we have to be guided by the primary reasons, which are few, simple, sublime and universal, bringing us constancy and peace; and not by secondary reasons, which belong to a lower and narrower sphere. They do not usually give conclusive answers in practice, and they are never satisfying, because they are so numerous. Moreover they leave the mind in a confused and disturbed state. This is true not only as a matter of logic: it is holy doctrine: our Lord taught his disciples to take account only of the great and primary reasons that I am talking about. It is these that give rise to the simplicity, constancy and magnanimity we find in the lives of the saints.

Here are some of these reasons which have the power and weightiness to reduce to nothing the innumerable slight, trivial secondary reasons.

1. A most loving Providence regulates and disposes all things: therefore I have to be content over everything that does not depend on me. I have to take it as certain that even something that seems to me amiss is still the means to my greater sanctification and happiness if only I will use it for my profit.

2. Since God is infinitely good, I must trust in him and throw myself on his mercy in my feebleness, even when I behave badly; I have to make every effort I can (though without anxiety or disturbance of mind) to overcome myself and do things perfectly; and whether I succeed in this or not, I must remember that my efforts, my very desire, are his gift and a pledge that he is willing to come to my help. Holy desires perseveringly nurtured in my heart cannot possibly fail to have their effect. This is why scripture says of a holy man simply that he is 'a man of desires'.

3. I must with all submissiveness accept the authority of the Church and of the Popes, and besides this, the sentiments and instincts (so to speak) of the saints.

4. The attitudes of the saints and the authority of the Church tell me that obedience to religious Superiors is a sure way to salvation and perfection. I am aware that God makes me thoroughly convinced in my heart of this truth. So what does it matter if my Superiors should make mistakes? I am safe when I obey. Again, if they, being only human, do err, God is not mistaken when he allows this to happen, and I am sure that he permits this for my greater good. Superiors are only instruments in the hands of God. So a command that, judged by secondary reasons, is mistaken, is not so when I look at it in the light of higher, primary reasons. So using primary reasons brings peace to my heart; it inspires in me affection and sympathy for my Superiors; and it makes it both pleasing and highly meritorious to obey in precisely those cases where secondary reasons merely cloud my mind, upset me, make me feel bitter and unloving towards my Superior, reluctant to obey and even hesitant in my vocation. So away with these secondary reasons: let them vanish like mist before the sun, leaving the sky of our soul clear and serene. We must not give any truck to them, but let the irresistible force of primary reasons smother them the moment they arise, annihilate them even *before* they arise.

5. I must have great esteem for my neighbour, and especially for my brethren and my Superior; I must put a good interpretation on everything, placing my understanding entirely at the service of my charity. On the other hand, I need to have an extreme distrust of myself and of my judgements, and consider myself inferior to all in the matter of virtue.

6. If I do something generous and holy I can be quite certain that I shall never regret it; I am sure that the consequences of this action will be good for me; and if I throw myself on God (as far as in my wretchedness I can), I am certain that he will not let me fall but will gather me in his arms.

These and similar sublime and *primary reasonings*, which form the foundation of our Institute, bring great peace to the heart, and enable even those who are weak, infirm and sinful to advance in holiness. I am convinced that in the depths of your heart these primary reasons prevail; but although they carry the day, they have not yet entirely overcome and destroyed the secondary reasons. I think too that there is much going on in your mind and your imagination which tends to put before you the reasons of a lower order; there is no limit to their number, and they tend to make a man talkative, involve him in endless useless arguments which only disedify others. I call on you to destroy them entirely, and make the divine and primary reasons your sole guides, bringing peace to your soul. So too I exhort you to make war on your own reasonings, submitting blindly to authority and obedience, relying on that saying of scripture: 'The obedient man will speak of victories.' This is how we must understand the saints

and other masters of the spiritual life when they tell us to renounce our own reasonings and judgements. This is a sublime teaching — the sure source of holiness!

What could be more wonderful than to travel with the assurance of gaining our goal, even though we are ignorant of the route we ought to follow and the trials we shall meet on the way? Oh beautiful and holy faith, I cling to you with all my heart, even though I may be blindfolded. 'The righteous man lives by faith.'

As for the way the Institute has been governed up to now, believe me, my dear brother, that since you do not know all the details you are in no position to form a true judgement. I have often gone over in my mind what has been done, and I believe that on the whole the will of God has been carried out. We have done everything that we could, given what we knew, and God has wonderfully done the rest.

As for mortifications, I want to correct one of your ideas. You say that once something has been laid down concerning the common life, we can do no less than conform to what most of the brethren do, so as not to give scandal. If we are simply talking about mortifications, I do not agree with you. The Institute values humility above all; and if one of our companions who is unable to practise mortification accepts the humiliation which comes to him from God and from his own conscience, and derives profit from this by humbling himself and recognizing his own weakness, he thereby practises virtue in a way that is very characteristic of our Institute. But what if others are scandalized? This should not happen. I greatly hope that in time all the members of the Institute will find it abhorrent to pass judgements on their brethren, and will know how to esteem and love them even if they do not practise the normal mortifications, believing that even so they may possess great treasures of virtue, and attributing the fact that they do not practise these mortifications to upright and even holy motives. To think otherwise and to lessen their esteem for their brethren for such trivial reasons shows a real ignorance. I want all our brethren to be well instructed over this and well practised in preserving great charity in their hearts. I think more highly of this disposition than of absolute conformity in common life, even though I should like to see as much uniformity of practice as possible. At the same time I want all to set great store by penance, and to give preference to community penances — for this is the spirit of the Church and of Jesus Christ and his saints. It is also the mind of our Institute.

As for opinions: the Institute gives complete freedom to its members, according to that most wise rule of St Augustine: *in necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus charitas* [In necessary matters unity, in doubtful matters freedom, in all things charity]. With regard to political opinions, I am sure that you will conform to the teachings of the Holy Father as expressed in the encyclicals published in condemnation of the Abbé De La Mennais. Perhaps you

have read the letter I sent to this priest, which was translated into French. To hold to the teachings of the Church is one of those *necessary* things in which unity must be preserved. For the rest, you are free, and I am pleased that you tell me you do not venture an opinion, since because the question is a most difficult and delicate one, it would be very risky to make a judgement without having studied this most complicated issue in all its aspects. I should like you to read that work of mine, 'Society and its Purpose'. In it I tried to make clear some important ideas which are closely related to this matter.

This letter is already long, and I simply have no time to write more. I think I have substantially covered all the points you raise. So, courage: liberty of conscience; generous and firm resolutions. May God help you and make you his own! Goodbye.

Yours in Christ,

R.

83. To His Eminence Cardinal Morozzo, Bishop of Novara

Domodossola, 15 March 1839

Your Eminence,

Our priest, Don Setti, has returned from Rome, and he had the honour of paying his respects to Your Eminence as he passed through Novara. I learn from him that you have received the contents of the decree of the Sacred Congregation, according to which the Apostolic Letters will be drawn up. I am quite satisfied with this decree, both because the privilege of exemption was stated as fully as could be desired, and also because all those bound to the Institute by indissoluble bonds may be ordained in virtue of life in common — and this includes our scholastics, which for us is indispensable. This effect resulted from the letter which Your Eminence was good enough to write, as required by the Holy Father in order to have some support in making these concessions — concessions which were looked on askance by certain influential religious and their friends.

So we have received all that we could have asked for through your intervention. I offer you my deepest gratitude, and indeed we shall all be perpetually grateful to you.

At present we are making a retreat in preparation for taking the Coadjutor vows (as we call them). With God's help we shall do this here at the Sacro Monte on the feast of the Annunciation to our Blessed Lady. This day is specially apt for many reasons, and it is the day on which I had the grace both of being *born* and also reborn in holy baptism. You will see, then, that we are understandably full of joy; but at the same time we have many spiritual needs, and so we ask earnestly for Your Eminence's blessing and holy prayers. We on our part, when the solemn day comes on which we shall (we hope) offer our hearts more fully than ever to the Lord, will not forget — it would be impossible for us to forget — our very dear pastor and father, Cardinal Morozzo.

On the same day that we pronounce our vows here, our companions in England will do the like; and we hope that when the time comes for taking Presbyter vows, our brethren will be able to come over from England and join us in person, either here at Monte Calvario or possibly in Rome in the presence of the Pope, if circumstances permit.

Although we want to keep our ceremony quiet and private, according to the spirit of our Institute, still certain of our principal friends will be present — such as Mellerio, Padulli and so on. Soon after Easter I shall have to go to Stresa to see about the building of the noviciate; and I intend on that occasion

to put before Your Eminence a request (which I hope you will grant) that our building may have the benefit of your patronage.

With deepest respect, together with our entire religious family, I humbly ask your blessing.

A. ROSMINI p.

84. To Baron G. B. Trentini, Dean of the Chapter in Trent

Domodossola, 18 March 1839

... I cannot tell you how welcome your letter was. It gave me further proof of your good heart and the sincere friendship you have always shown me in prosperity and in adversity — something rarely found in this world.

Your advice about writing to the Prince Bishop was very wise, and I esteemed it all the more since I would undoubtedly have forgotten to do so — not out of any lack of willingness but because with my feeble strength I cannot cope with everything. I have written the letter³² without delay, and I shall send it off by the same post as this.

However, though it is useless to go over old ground, to speak frankly I do not share the view you express — that our Bishop could not have prevented the failure of the Institute in the Trent diocese. It would not have left had not the good Bishop required nothing less than 'the power to take priests from the Institute and send them here or there as chaplains in the diocese without any reference to the Superior of the Institute.' This was an impossible demand, and something that was never asked of any religious Congregation — not even the Oratorians, though they have no vows. I could not possibly have acceded to this arrangement, which would have destroyed the Institute within a week. So I withdrew it from the diocese, and the government (which had been chiefly responsible) took no action in the matter. It had cleverly used the Bishop for its own ends.

But as I said, it is pointless to go back over things past. It was God who so disposed, and everything was for his greater glory. I have had, and continue to have (more every day) tangible proof that by placing our trust in him we can never go wrong. I simply ask you to commend me to God with fervent prayers, especially at the present time.

I am writing this letter during the retreat in preparation for the great act [of taking our vows], and so I cannot write at great length. Remember me, if you will, to Rigler and Fusari³³ and convey to them my deep respect and affection. Believe me, always —

Your most humble servant and friend,

A. ROSMINI p.

³² The letter written by Rosmini to the Bishop of Trent notifying him of the approval of the Institute and asking his blessing prior to taking the religious vows which would make him exempt from the jurisdiction of his own diocese of Trent can be found in E.C. 3754.

³³ Don Bernardo Fusari was a very holy priest and a friend of Rosmini.

85. To His Eminence Cardinal Castracane in Rome

Domodossola, 25 March 1839

Your Eminence,

I think it my duty to share with you the joy which filled our hearts on this feast of the Annunciation to our Lady as we took our holy vows. We owe our indescribable happiness largely to the constant zeal and care which Your Eminence has shown in bringing to a favourable conclusion the cause of the Apostolic approval of the Institute. There were 25 of our members chosen to make this first profession, of which 6 were in England and 19 at Calvario³⁴. From these will be drawn the first Presbyters of the Society who will take the fourth vow, to the Sovereign Pontiff. Also there were some who were admitted to Scholastic vows³⁵, and the others to preparatory vows³⁶. One of the 25 who made their profession went (as I greatly hope) to announce the fact in paradise. He had lived the life of an angel, and he died the death of a saint.³⁷

On this same occasion may I beg you of your kindness to convey to our beloved Holy Father my letter of thanks. I waited until now to send it (having previously thanked him through Don Setti), so as to inform him that we have carried out the joyful ceremony of our first vows. We hope to have soon also the Apostolic Letters which will constitute the complete fulfilment of our desires.

With deepest respect, veneration and gratitude,

A. ROSMINI p.

³⁴ The vows of Spiritual Coadjutors were made in Italy first by Narchialli, then by Rosmini, Molinari, Boselli, Alvazzi, Flecchia, Puecher, Setti, Martin, Gilardi, Bonnefoy, Rusca, Cicoletti, Toscani and Mazzi; and in England by Gentili, Pagani, Belisy and Rinolfi. The vows of Temporal Coadjutors were made in Italy by Antonio Bisogni, Giacomo Lugan, Giuseppe Maria Ferrari, Giuseppe Pelluchini and Carlo Frischini; and in England by Pietro Zencher. The first professed members were therefore 25, one of whom, because of serious illness, made his vows before the others at Domodossola, while 19 made them together at Monte Calvario and 5 in England. (cf. the personal notes kept in the Rosminian archives, and also E.C. 3763).

³⁵ Among these was the clerical student Fortunato Signini.

³⁶ One of these was Don Moses Furlong.

³⁷ Narchialli.

86. To His Holiness Pope Gregory XVI in Rome

Domodossola, 25 March 1839

Holy Father,

The greatness of the debt of gratitude that I and the whole Institute of Charity owe to Your Holiness is something we feel intensely in our hearts but are incapable of expressing in words. I see in the Apostolic confirmation that you have been so good as to accord to the Institute the most complete justification for the great confidence which has led me for so long to hope that it would be from you, and in your glorious pontificate, that a work which could be said to have come into existence in your hands has been firmly established — a work that has been promoted and encouraged through your kindness, charity and prudence. This event has assured us all that the enterprise we undertook is in accord with the divine will, and we acknowledge that the great favour we have received from the Holy See is immeasurable, since we want the glory of God to be our sole good, and we believe we can now say to the Lord: 'We give thanks for thy great glory.' We acknowledge too that such a benefit must make us pledge ourselves more than ever to serve God, Your Holiness and the Holy Church with fidelity and fervour. So trusting in divine grace, we dare to promise you this as far as our weakness allows. And so as to obtain heavenly aid in greater abundance, in order that we may carry out to perfection what we have been granted the will to purpose, we have bound ourselves irrevocably to God with the profession of the holy bond of the religious vows on this feast of the Annunciation to our Blessed Lady. Through this act, too, we have put ourselves under the protection of our Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the most loving Mother and Patroness of our Institute.

From among those who have taken the first vows (which we call Coadjutor vows) will be chosen after a while some who will profess a fourth vow, of dedication to any mission given by the Sovereign Pontiff, and they will thereby attain the grade of *Presbyters of the Society*. In the meanwhile we eagerly await the arrival of the Apostolic Letters which Your Holiness has been good enough to arrange to have sent.

Of your kindness and charity, then, accept our humble gratitude, and with that the permanent offering of ourselves. Though we are not present in body to prostrate ourselves at your feet, we do so in spirit with all our heart and with the utmost filial devotion.

Since I was encouraged by the kind words with which Your Holiness urged me to continue to publish my works — words which were conveyed to me by our priest Giuseppe Roberto Setti — I venture to present you with two books in which are gathered together some of my parish sermons, as well as two others dealing with philosophical and moral topics. Since my intention in these works, as in all

that I write, was solely that of promoting the spiritual well-being of others, I am induced to lay before you, as I have done in the past, a copy of these books of mine. Not only do I intend to show Your Holiness my entire personal veneration and filial attachment, but I also wish to manifest in this way the fullest submission of my judgement and of all my teachings to you as the Vicar of Christ and universal Teacher.

Finally, in my lively trust that Your Holiness will never cease to look with kindness and clemency on me, your humble servant, and on my companions, I with them beg on bended knee your Apostolic Blessing.

I am, most Holy Father,

Your most humble, grateful and obedient servant,

A. ROSMINI p.

87. To Don G. B. Loewenbruck at Béziers³⁸

Stresa, 3 April 1839

My dear Father,

Your letter of 21 March, which I have just received, gives my heart a fresh pang. I pray that God will give you the light to see the truth.

To judge by what you say about the Institute, you do not believe

that it is not my wish to put any pressure on you. I neither invite you nor refuse you. I hope that those who come to the Institute do so because they are moved by God, not men. If God is calling you (without your own passions coming into the matter) to some other institute, go and join it. If God gives you the perseverance to remain in this one, then remain: but with greater humility, sincerity and frankness. Without humility and obedience you will get nowhere, but only deceive yourself! So let God alone be your end and your adviser. From me you have received and will receive nothing but love. The only offences I have committed towards you consist in loving you. Goodbye.

A. ROSMINI p.

³⁸ Loewenbruck did not arrive to take his vows along with his companions, but left the Institute once for all. However he retained great veneration for Rosmini up to the time of his death, which took place in 1876 at Angers.

88. To Don Francesco Paoli at Rovereto

Stresa, 20 April 1839

My dear brother in Jesus Christ,

Thanks be to the good Lord, who speaks to your heart and makes you feel ever more fully how delightful it is for us to make a complete offering of ourselves to him who is the God of love. Fan the spark that the Holy Spirit has enkindled in you, feeding it through holy thoughts and a life of recollection, wholly taken up with God, and with God alone. *Meditate* on the *Maxims of*

Perfection and the *Rules* of the Institute, arousing your love by kneeling at the foot of the cross, or at least by placing yourself constantly in the presence of God our Father. Give up everything, detach yourself more day by day from the things that nature best loves, and humble yourself in all that you do or think. In this way you will be strengthened in your vocation, and you will feel able to follow it without delay. Goodbye. Let us be united in prayer.

Yours affectionately in the Lord,

ROSMINI p.

89. To Don Luigi Gentili at Prior Park

Stresa, 2 May 1839

My dear companion in the service of Jesus Christ. . .

Be certain that the more you renounce yourself, and trust not in your own ideas but simply in your Superior's authority with lively faith in God, the better it will be for your holiness and peace of soul. You will then become a prudent man. But this will never happen if you try to carry out plans of your own and act in a secretive fashion, taking no notice of the instructions and advice sent to you, through subtle reasonings and tricks of the imagination which make you harbour false hopes and see things otherwise than they really are. By so acting, you fail to use the sincerity and enlightenment which Superiors should try to practise themselves and bring about in the whole Institute.

Coming now to what you tell me in your letter of 12 April: I will not tell you all the thoughts that come into my mind, but restrict myself to what may profit you and help the brethren there and the Institute in England.

(1) I disapprove of your excessive and over-hasty introduction of scapulars, holy pictures and other special devotions. These are good in themselves, certainly, but they better suit countries that have been Catholic for a long time, rather than one where people are new to the faith. You would have done better to make haste slowly over using such things, being guided not by your own habitual devotions, but rather making allowances for the people and the situation there. In this matter again I find you lacking in docility: I have told you many a time to stick to the fundamental principles of our religion, reflecting on and studying what Jesus Christ and the apostles said and did. The apostles, dealing with people who were still pagan, did not begin by preaching the merits of scapulars of our Lady or anything of the sort, but instead concentrated on making known to the world Jesus Christ, the Holy Trinity, the Incarnation, the various virtues, and so on. This is the sort of devotion that suits the condition of the English people and could do great good. The knowledge and love of God, of Jesus Christ and of our neighbour: these are the things that your preaching should mainly deal with for quite some time. Other things can follow. You do not offer a starving man a piece of sugar, but a good slice of bread. Although sugar is sweeter than bread, he will be annoyed if you offer him that instead. The bread corresponds to the main elements in our devotion, whereas the little devotions that you favour so much are the sugar.

(2) I disapprove too of your having introduced so many reforms in so short a time and in so many matters. It is not enough that the reform should be good in itself: prudence consists wholly in being able to foresee the effect of the reform — whether it will be accepted, whether it will last. But you have clean forgotten the warning I gave you about this in paragraph 15 of the letter of

mission. And why was this? Because of your presumption, that makes you believe so often that you see further than your Superiors. Jesus Christ wanted us to see the serpent as the symbol of prudence; and this is because a serpent never falls on the ground but always adapts itself to the terrain; and never goes ahead without first testing way ahead with its body. So prudence does not rush ahead to reach a goal, but adapts itself to the situation; and if it meets with an obstacle it does not risk breaking its head, but like the serpent, negotiates a way round it. You, while you must not lack the simplicity of the dove, must not fail to use the prudence of the serpent. The simplicity of the dove consists in blind obedience.

At the same time you must not think that I attribute all that has gone wrong to your fault. Take my words for what they really are: they come of my most sincere desire to see our affairs go ahead with all possible perfection and with the blessing of the Lord. I want us to be ever more anxious to acquire, through God's help, solid virtues in which there is no deception. And among these are holy prudence, fortitude and perseverance. So do not be sad over this letter of mine, but rather feel happy; and this will be a sign that self-love has been banished and that charity reigns within us. Have complete faith in God, and the courage that comes of love. My warmest greetings to you, and I ask the Lord to bless you abundantly.

Your in Christ,

ROSMINI p.

90. To Don Moses Furlong³⁹ in England

Stresa. 2 May 1839

My dear brother,

I rejoiced in the Lord over your letter of 17 April, since I saw clear evidence in it that *God* is granting you light, and a desire in your heart to become all his, and to take no account of the things of this world. This truly is the aim of the humble Institute to which the Lord is calling you. I am sure that *God* will give you ever more grace day by day, together with the strength to perfect the sacrifice of self which makes a man like our crucified Saviour. Our sole wealth consists in faith in divine Providence, universal charity, indifference to any position, fortitude in affliction, and obedience till death. These goods are all we desire, and we strive for them in close union of hearts and wills, and with humble prayer to our heavenly Father.

This is the essence of all our rules and of the whole Institute. What may happen in the future is unforeseeable; but we must feel no disquiet over this and rather leave everything in the hands of our Father, content to know that they will make for our well-being. 'For those who love *God*, all things work together for good.' Take every care to preserve the great graces you have received; and let the thought that you are the first to be called [to the Institute] in England foster in you an ardent desire to correspond generously with them. You must be the cornerstone of the foundation in that country. Stone is hard and resists blows; so you will need to have the courage and constancy that, together with the arms of faith and prayer, the sweet unction of charity and the light of prudence, will lead to triumph in the conflict, and healing of the wounds inflicted by our enemies.

I hear that it is possible that you may be joined by some English companions. May *God* bring about whatever is for his greater glory. Pray for me. I embrace you with respect and affection. Yours in Christ,

R.

³⁹ Fr Moses Furlong, the first Englishman to enter the Institute, was an exemplary religious and an indefatigable missionary. He travelled widely throughout England and Ireland, preaching and giving proof of extraordinary zeal and outstanding talents in proclaiming the word of *God*.

91. To Brother Pietro Zencher⁴⁰ in England

Stresa, 2 May 1839

My dear Pietro,

A word to you also. Now that you are joined [to us] with the bonds of love, I hope that you will be happy and will rejoice in the Lord Jesus, in whom we have also Mary, your Mother and Patroness; and that you will be resolved to serve them with all your heart and all your strength. Pray to them, asking for grace for yourself and also for your father who is writing to you, little though he is worthy. But God does not consider our merits: rather, he produces merit where there was none, and makes water gush forth from stones. My dear Pietro, do pray for this 'stone' who is addressing you!

Thank you for your latest letter. If you become ever more humble, obedient and cheerful in the midst of your work and your trials, you will receive a great bonus on top of your reward. Have no doubt about this.

Yours affectionately in Christ,

A. R.

⁴⁰ Brother Zencher, whom Rosmini treated with such familiarity, was born at Sacco, near Rovereto. He was the first laybrother to take the Temporal Coadjutor vows in England, and also the first member of the Institute to die there, going to a better life in 1841.

92. To Don Francesco Puecher at Calvario

Stresa, 5 May 1839

My dear Francesco,

I have heard V. praised for his virtue. The little that I have seen and the little contact I have had with him leads me to believe that he does not know the Institute — I think he has read the *Maxims*, though without understanding them. The best way to win him over is mainly through his intellect, making him understand and enter into the great principles of the gospel in general, without immediately drawing out from them any practical consequences, and without putting any pressure on him. Instead, give him time to see those consequences for himself, and of his own accord apply to himself the principles of perfection; and so bring it about that in due course he arrives at the sublime state of indifference. When he has got this far, then it is a matter of working on him more freely; and even if he feels temptations, this will not make him give up, because he will have grasped well the principles.

Notice that after explaining these principles to him, at different times and in different ways, and showing him the ineffable beauty and happiness of adhering to them, it will be well to urge him to do two things: (1) to make acts of the will, telling God that he wants to follow them; and also to express his desires and his longings and so on; (2) to send up prayers to God, asking him for the grace to appreciate the substance of them more and more and put them into practice. The greater resolution and generosity he brings to these two things, the more he will acquire the true spirit of perseverance in the path he has entered upon.

Give my greetings to dear Cicoletti and tell him that I am glad he is going ahead with his studies — which I urge him always to join to the study of religious perfection. You must all be of good heart in our Lord. Goodbye.

Yours affectionately in Christ,

ROSMINI p.

93. To His Eminence Cardinal Castracane in Rome

Stresa, 14 May 1839

Your Eminence,

The other evening I was extremely pleased to receive Your Eminence's much-appreciated letter of 13 April, together with the Brief drafted by Canon Pacifici. It so happened that Cardinal Morozzo was here with us at the time, as he had laid the foundation stone of our new noviciate on the feast of the Ascension. I at once showed him the Brief, and he expressed great pleasure over the approval, as of something he had greatly wished for and had often asked me about. As we read it together, it seemed to both the Cardinal and myself, that the Brief had been drawn up in a truly admirable fashion, and we could do no less than greatly praise the Canon, who had been skilful enough to express, with all dignity, elegance and learning the nature of our Institute — not a single phrase being out of place.

The fact that the Holy Father had named the first Provost General in the Brief pleased me, in that it meant a confirmation of his authority. But when I found that he intended to name myself for this post, this displeased and dismayed me greatly. It is true that up to now I have been the nominal head of the Society; but at the same time I have always protested to my companions that I only accepted the task of guiding it, on a temporary and provisional basis, until such time as the Institute should be fully established and confirmed by the Apostolic See, and in a position to elect a Superior General. Now, by the grace of God, the Institute has some excellent subjects, from among whom it would not be difficult to choose a holy and prudent priest to direct it in the capacity of Provost General.

It may be that the Holy Father has not yet seen all the details of the Brief, and so knows nothing of the intended nomination. In this case I would earnestly beg Your Eminence to see that the section concerning the nomination is completely removed, without anything being said to the Pope. If on the other hand the nomination is the Holy Father's doing, or if he is aware of it, you could let him know that (if he commands it) I could suggest another member of the Institute as Provost General — someone who has the full confidence of all the members, a man endowed with holiness and wisdom who would be entirely suitable for nomination to this position. Do not, Your Eminence, attribute what I say to a false humility: rather, it displeases me greatly to have to say these things, which could be taken as either genuine or feigned humility. What moves me to speak like this is nothing less than the obligation I feel in conscience to say what I believe is true. I realize that I have a certain standing, and it was because of this that Cardinal Morozzo tried to persuade me not to oppose the inclusion of the part of the Brief in question. But I am far from believing that our Institute should rely on the esteem which the mistaken and fallacious world

of men may attribute to this or that person. Instead I am sure that the Institute, which has no wish to become or appear great, must base itself solely on the solid virtue of its members. Otherwise it would be a house built on sand. For myself, I am all too aware that I am very far from possessing the virtues required for the office which there is a desire to give me. I know that it may seem an affectation to reel off to Your Eminence a list of the defects of mine that I am aware of (and which may be only a fraction of those that I am not conscious of), but it is none the less necessary that I should tell you about them in general, assuring you that they are both innumerable and substantial. In view of them, it is a wonder that the Institute, even with God's support, has been able to reach its present state; but this is not the first time that the Lord has made use, for a work of his, of an instrument that seemed to be fit for nothing but to be thrown on the fire.

On top of my lack of virtue there is the feebleness of my physical powers, which daily diminish, and which often means that I am incapable of doing what I should like to do. Finally I must confess to you that I have always considered any sort of ecclesiastical dignity as an enormous burden, posing a great threat and obstacle to my spiritual progress. So I formed long ago the resolution that I would never accept any such dignity unless I was constrained by obedience under pain of sin, by someone who had the power to command me. And here I must mention the vow that all the priests of the Institute, myself included, have to take and have taken: it binds us in precisely the terms mentioned above — 'never to accept any high dignity *unless constrained* etc.' It is likely that Your Eminence is not aware of this, since it is not included in the Rule, but only in the full version of the Constitutions. It is clear that such a vow is necessary in our Institute; for although it wishes to carry out all possible works of charity, and these could include some associated with an ecclesiastical dignity, this could leave the door open to ambition — ambition which could be the ruin of everything. For this reason provision is made to exclude this evil, by arranging that no high office may be accepted by its members unless expressly under obedience.

To make this account complete I must add that it is true that when it comes to the election of the Provost General this vow does not apply, since No. 59 of the Rule states that the one elected may not refuse the office. But I claim the right to interpret that paragraph strictly, understanding it as applying solely to an 'ordinary' election, carried out in the way prescribed by the Rule. Hence I consider myself as still impeded from accepting the Provostship by reason of the vow I have described.

But quite apart from this, I beg Your Eminence, through the goodness and charity you have always shown me, to give me yet another proof of these qualities (and it will be the greatest of all), by seeing to it that some other priest is named in the Brief; and if this is not possible, rather let no one be named. Moreover, please arrange if possible that my name does not even appear

in the Brief, according to the instruction I gave to Don Setti. This would be best, though I fear that Cardinal Morozzo may be right when he says that this cannot be.

I shall be pleased to pay the necessary fee for this work, and as soon as I know the exact amount I shall at once see to this. However, if the Holy Father in his generosity (as Your Eminence gives me reason to hope) should be pleased to relieve me of this expense, I should regard it as a gift made to the Institute.

In the meantime, please convey my feelings of deep satisfaction and gratitude to the excellent Canon Pacifici. I will add no more, as I want this letter to be sent off at once.

I am, Your Eminence, with deep respect and grateful affection,

Yours,

A. ROSMINI p.

94. To Don Carlo Gilardi at the Sagra di San Michele

Stresa, 21 May 1839

My dear brother in Christ,

I strongly urge on you composure and patience. Bear in mind that you have to be a pastor and father of the souls of your brethren, so as to lead them to perfection in all solid virtues. Everything you do or say should have this aim, without any trace of inconstancy.

Above all, maintain charity among them all: you have to be the centre, the hearth (so to speak) to which they all come so as to take away the flame to light their lamps in order to spread fire everywhere. God will help you with his grace if you pray to him from your heart, particularly in this season when the Holy Spirit first came down in the form of tongues of fire.

So see that there is order in everything: unite firmness with gentleness; but never let this gentleness lapse into weak compliance. Goodbye. May you receive abundant consolation from the Paraclete.

Yours,

ROSMINI p.

95. To Don G. B. Pagani in England

Stresa, 21 May 1839

My dear brother in the Lord Jesus Christ,

Two serious errors or imprudent moves have been made concerning ascription to the Institute, and I want you in my name and with all charity to warn dear Don Luigi [Gentili] so that none of our brethren commit them any more. These imprudences are: (1) offering ascription to persons who have not asked for this spontaneously. (This pushing things forward and taking the initiative goes quite against our wish to follow Providence in all simplicity and humility); (2) telling Mr King that he would be the Institute's lawyer if it took root in England. A local Superior has not the authority to make such promises for the future, which is quite uncertain. These vague promises, conditional on unknown events, are totally opposed to the prudence of the serpent which we have to join with the simplicity of the dove.

In giving information from now on about ascription to the Institute, it must be shown as being (1) like a brotherhood and sharing of spiritual benefits; (2) as a bond of friendship which is established between the Institute and the Ascribed for mutual help towards personal holiness, and for the carrying out of acts of charity towards our neighbour, all in a relationship of Christian liberty. There is no need for you to add that the Institute should guide people in the choice of a spiritual director, and that the Ascribed should have confidence in its Superiors, both because these things could be misunderstood, and also because they are matters of counsel, not of precept, and would come about naturally by degrees, without any need to speak about them.

I have received the account of the taking of your vows, and I read it with much spiritual joy. Send it to Calvario, so that they can share the same joy. I hope for good things of Agar, and that he will triumph over his spiritual enemies. But he must be able to report that he has done this before he enters the Institute. He must groan and cry out to the Lord with all his heart until he is granted this grace. He is to be generous with God, avoid occasions of temptation, remain in the company of reliable people all the time, confess frankly the smallest of his faults at once to his director, practise penance and work hard to achieve the complete victory he needs. I will receive him with great joy when he has obtained the grace by which to win the day, and he will be even more dear to me than if he had not needed to fight. Use all charity towards him, and treat him from now on as already a son by desire.

You will receive with this letter your nomination as Superior of the brethren there, since Don Luigi has come to the end of his three-year period in this post. It would be best if he could be at Prior Park when the decree is published; and

if there is any likelihood of this, wait a few days without saying anything about the decree, so that he can tell the community about it himself.

As you take up the post of Superior, I recommend you to invoke the Holy Spirit's help and, as a preparation, study all the rules and regulations (as prescribed) which we must from now on put into practice. Even the Mosaic Law could not, to begin with, be carried out in its entirety by the Israelites; and this is the case with all legislation. Hence Moses himself, who gave it, did not see all its provisions put into practice, since he died before the people entered the Promised Land. And prior to his death he said to them: 'You shall not act as we are acting today, all of us according to our own desires; for you have not yet come into the rest and the possession that the Lord your God is giving you.' (Deut, 12). God himself did not demand more from the Israelites, and nor can we be too demanding in our Institute. Still, now that we have obtained the approval of the Holy See, we can be said to have entered our Promised Land; and so we must begin to carry out our rules not only in spirit but as far as possible to the letter.

I urge you especially to be faithful in sending me an account of everything (as I prescribed to Don Luigi), and to observe what is laid down as regards the Diary, the various books of the house, and the consultations, according to the rules of Superiors which have been sent to you and any which may be sent from Calvario in the future.

I bless you, my dear brother, and all the others — particularly our two dear priest-novices⁴¹, and I wish all of you charity and holiness without limit.
Goodbye.

Yours affectionately in Christ,

ROSMINI p.

⁴¹ Fr Moses Furlong and Fr James Shepherd.

96. To Don Luigi Gentili in England

Stresa, 22 May 1839

My dear brother and friend. . .

The saints, when they were given the office of Superior, received it reluctantly and with tears; and so when they were relieved of it they rejoiced, taking this as a notable grace. This how I expect you, and all our brethren, to react, showing no attachment to the post, and with a great desire to give a good example of humility and obedience, practising as subjects these gospel virtues.

I had the consolation of seeing the Rector of Monte Calvario behave like this when, at the end of his three-year term, I had to relieve him of the office of Superior; and I am sure that my dear Don Luigi will act similarly. For the rest, do not suppose that my removing you as Rector is a sign that I am dissatisfied with you. Certainly not. Rather, I am very pleased; and I attribute to your zeal and your labours (which have been blessed by the Lord) the many good things that have happened. If you have in fact acted imprudently at times, well, I know that no one is born a perfect master, and that God allows these faults to occur so that he can humble his beloved friends, make them holy, and take away from them any spirit of presumption. Hence even faults can result in good; and your own failings have benefited you spiritually, as you have told me. So now give the others an example of submission by showing your respect for your new Superior; and bless God for giving you this occasion of doing so. Write to me as soon as you can, telling me about your feelings over all this, and console me. Pray to the Lord and get others to pray earnestly for —

Your father in Christ,

A. R.

97. To Don Francesco Paoli at Rovereto

Stresa, 1 June 1839

My dear brother in our Lord Jesus Christ,

I was very pleased to hear that the grace of the Lord strengthens and confirms you in your vocation. I say 'the grace of the Lord', because your resolution could only come from this, since what we are talking about is a total giving of yourself to God, in life and in death; and of consecrating to his glory alone all your powers, all your time, your entire will, everything you have and are on this earth. For it is precisely this that our little Institute proposes. I hope that I shall soon see you with us, for *the grace of the Holy Spirit does not brook delay*. Within a few days we shall greet one another: towards the end of the month I shall probably be returning to my beloved brethren — could you not go with me then? Arrange things so that this may be possible. *My child, when you come to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for testing. Set your heart right and be steadfast.* (Sir 2, 1-2).

My affectionate and respectful greetings to Monsignor [Sardagna], and to you too. Goodbye.

Yours affectionately in Christ,

R.

98. To the Superior of the Sisters of Providence in Domodossola⁴²San Carlo⁴³, Stresa, 6 June 1839

Dear Sister Giovanna,

Sister Maria Francesca Parea wrote to me and to Don Carlo on your behalf, asking me to send your director for the government of the Sisters to Domodossola for a few days. I would gladly do this if it were possible. But the Lord has at present given Don Carlo so many things to occupy him that he is unable to come. So you must resign yourself, my dear daughter, to doing without him. Do not be downcast over this: rather reflect in your heart that the sublime Providence and goodness of God will not fail you, and that the Lord wishes by means of these trials to make you gradually into a woman distinguished by wisdom, great activity, courage and strength. You must realize that these virtues greatly please God: they all derive from his love, and he is not pleased to see his servants grow despondent or give in to sadness, as if he were going to fail them. So be sure that as long as you do all that you can on your own, God will increase your strength as a reward for your faith, and you will be able to accomplish much more than you do at present.

You must realize too that journeys cost money and take time; and so you must not trouble Superiors by making them travel for too little reason. As Sister Francesca says, it is well not to depend too much on letters without real need. But as I say, the Lord wants you to make a practice of doing as much as you can that he can humble his beloved friends, make them holy, and take away from them any spirit of presumption. Hence even faults can result in good; and your own failings have benefited you spiritually, as you have told me. So now give the others an example of submission by showing your respect for your new Superior; and bless God for giving you this occasion of doing so. Write to me as soon as you can, telling me about your feelings over all this, and console me. Pray to the Lord and get others to pray earnestly for

Your father in Christ,

A. R.

⁴² Towards the end of 1837 the noviciate of the Sisters was transferred from Locarno to Domodossola, and this became the central house and the residence of the Superior General.

⁴³ This is the first letter in which the house on the hill above Stresa is called 'San Carlo'. A large house was in course of construction there as a noviciate, which was going to be moved to Stresa as its permanent home. A new chapel was also being built, dedicated to the crucified Saviour and our Lady of Sorrows, to St John the evangelist and to St Charles. The church which Rosmini was to build later, and in which his body is venerated today, was also dedicated to Jesus Crucified and our Lady of Sorrows etc. (cf. *Vita di A. Rosmini*, vol. 11, pp.9, 28).

99. To Don C. A. at Domodossola

San Carlo, near Stresa, 6 June 1839

My dear Father,

I do not think there is any need for you to think further about the money given by Molem; but I do think it most necessary, my dear brother, to think about acquiring that complete frankness with the Superiors of our Institute which is required: so that nothing should be kept secret from them on any pretext whatever. Make every effort to reach this blessed state of openness, so that truth may dwell in us. Take it as certain that hiding anything from Superiors is always the result of passions and attachments contrary to perfection; and that the man who has become entirely sincere and open has in this way ensured his eternal salvation.

I take this opportunity to tell you exactly how you are to occupy yourself; and I instruct you expressly that from now on you are to restrict yourself to two things only: first, you must put your efforts into the school work that has been entrusted to you, and into everything that can promote the well-being of the youngsters, carrying out this very important work of charity for the love of Jesus Christ; and, second, you must use all diligence in preparing a week's retreat, to be given in the seminary of S. Giulio. So henceforth leave aside any and every study of antiquity and local history, so as to occupy all your energies and your time in these two great aims and the means to realize them.

I embrace you most affectionately from my heart; and for your fault in keeping from me the Molem affair I want you as a penance to say for my intentions a whole rosary with the litany of our Lady.

Yours affectionately,

ROSMINI p.

100. To Sister Giovanna Antonietti⁴⁴, Superior at Domodossola

San Carlo, Stresa, 15 July 1839

My dear daughter and companion in the service of Jesus Christ,

Please note that in future the novices may never leave the noviciate, whether they are ill or well, for a change of air or any other reason. Illness must be borne in the place where God sends it, and it is to be received as a means of purifying the soul. Even the professed Sisters are not allowed to go from one place to another simply for the sake of their health, unless there is also a reason springing from charity - since the Sisters of Providence must live in this matter as if they were enclosed. Indeed the only reason why they are *not* enclosed is for the sake of carrying out the works of charity proper to the Institute they belong to. So they are not to travel or change place unless their particular ministries require this. This therefore excludes leaving the house simply to improve their health, or for any other merely human purpose. So think well about this feature of your Institute, and be more careful another time before you put such a suggestion to me.

Be careful also that self-love does not deceive you, by perhaps prompting you to rid yourself of someone who is troublesome, on the pretext of giving a novice a change of air. Never unburden your shoulders of the crosses and trials which God sends you. Remember too that you as Superior must tolerate the defects of the novices and wait patiently for their amendment, constantly asking God for this in your prayers. If because of a lack of this patience you were to dismiss a novice who was perhaps destined by God for great things, would you not be thus refusing a gift that the goodness of God intended to make through this person to the Institute, and would you not at the same time be depriving the Institute of a member who was destined to be valuable, and your neighbour of the help that might have been given, and the young woman - sent away without grave reasons - of the grace she might have received in the Institute?

So show the greatest charity and patience with the novices when their defects are not serious, and wait even a year for the fruit you would like to see in a day or a month. For it is God alone who determines the times and moments of salvation.

Yours in Christ,

A. ROSMINI p.

⁴⁴ Sister Giovanna Antonietti was the first Superior of the Central House at Domodossola, by the unanimous vote of her companions, who loved and venerated her as a mother, and through the kindly consent of Rosmini, who had recognized in her the proof of outstanding virtue under trial, as well as her uncommon gift for governing with firmness combined with gentleness. With the agreement of Rosmini's successors Sister Antonietti continued in the post of Superior of the Central House for 35 years, right up to her death, which occurred on 13 November 1872. (cf. the *Life* of her written by Don Francesco Paoli, p. 115.)

101. To the novice Matilde Stedile at Domodossola

Stresa, 23 July 1839

My dear daughter,

I was very pleased to learn from your letter that you are 'thoroughly contented with everything.' Seek for God only, and detach yourself from all the things of this world. Then you will feel in yourself an increase in the strength which will enable you to overcome temptations. The devil does not tempt us unless we give him the opportunity through our attachment to worldly things. If we were attached to nothing but God, we should enjoy 'the liberty of the children of God', and no temptation would trouble us. But if we are attached by a single thread to this world, that is enough to prevent us from freely taking flight to higher things. Reflect that God, in giving you the grace to leave the world, and calling you to his special service in the cloister, wants to see great things of you and calls on you for a generous response. So - generosity! With prayer you will obtain this, for by prayer we can obtain everything. But it is necessary to ask specially for the graces we know we stand in need of: often ask Jesus your Spouse that you may be crucified with him to the world and to yourself, and live only in him and for him. I will not fail to offer my prayers that he may grant you so great a grace, and you must always pray for me. Greatly love and esteem your holy Institute, your Rules, your companions and your Superiors. All those here to whom you sent greetings return them. Goodbye.

Your father in Christ,

A. R.

102. To Canon Challamel⁴⁵ at Annecy

Stresa, 24 July 1839

Dear Reverend Sir,

I greatly valued the remarks you were good enough to make about my *Catechism*. It is true that it could have done with a preface. I thought about this but had not the time to write one. As for your second suggestion, that of adding some proof of the spiritual nature of the soul: this did not form part of my plan. I am convinced that young people should be taught the truths of religion first and foremost on the authority of the teacher as minister of the Church. The young person himself asks for no more; and he receives with greater simplicity and firmness of consent (as well as greater merit) the truths which are taught him in the name of God. Moreover, I do not think that the pupil is in a position to understand the force of the rational proofs of the spirituality of the soul. So if we go in for reasonings that are beyond his capacity to receive them, one of two things happens: either he believes' in the force of the arguments on the authority of his teacher, without properly understanding them; or, not yielding to that authority, and at the same time not understanding the arguments, he wavers in the assent which he should give to the truths he is taught.

Besides this, if we introduce the appeal of unaided reason into religious matters, we foster presumption in the young man, and he easily comes to think that he is not obliged to consent to other things that he does not understand or that seem to him to be unproved by pure reason. So I am displeased when I find in modern catechisms 'rational' proofs. I do not think there should be found in Christian catechisms any but *theological reasons* — that is, such reasons as can be drawn from the previously presented truths of the faith. It seems to me that this is the sole manner of arguing used by Christ in the gospel. For instance, to refute the Sadducees who did not believe in the immortality of the soul, Christ did not offer them any rational, philosophical arguments; instead he deduced the soul's immortality from the fact that

God calls himself in scripture *the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob*, and he draws the conclusion that the soul is immortal from the words: *He is God not of the dead but of the living.*

With regard to your last remark, about the instantaneousness of the creation of the universe, the opinion I expressed, which is based on the well-known passage of scripture, *he created all things at once*, and on the view of St Augustine and other interpreters, I developed this more fully in my *Parish*

⁴⁵ Canon Challamel was the first to translate the *Maxims of Perfection* into French. (cf. E.C. 2831).

Catechism, a compendium of which was printed by a priest who gathered my talks together. It seems to me the opinion which best agrees with the text of scripture when it says that God created the heavens and the earth *in principio* [in the beginning] - since if God had created anything after the first instant it could not be said to be *in principio*. It fits also God's way of working; and it easily avoids the many problems raised by both enemies and friends when they appeal to geology or the other sciences.

Commend me to the Lord, and believe that I am

Your humble and affectionate friend and servant,

A. ROSMINI p.

103. To Don Alessio Martin at MoutiersLivorno⁴⁶, 12 August 1839

My dear brother in our Lord Jesus Christ,

I cannot grant what you ask for in your letter of 2 August. Instead I want you to return as soon as possible to your own house, San Michele. I am sure that you want to do the will of God, and you are too well-informed not to know that his will is to be found only in obedience, and that when this is lacking there can be no solid virtue but only self-love and self-deceit. You remember that I agreed when you asked to make a pilgrimage, and again when you wanted to go to Savoy, though with certain provisos. I was hoping that after that you would at once return to San Michele della Chiusa, and that there you would have devoted yourself and all your efforts to living out your vocation. This is in fact your duty, and you must not be distracted from it by anything at all. So too you know the obligation you have to work in harmony with the whole body of the Institute you are part of, and to promote its well-being. This is what God wants of you; and you can only do his will by living in the houses of the Institute with such companions as Providence gives you. This means resisting and overcoming in yourself the leanings which, however good they may seem to be, are opposed to the one end which you must put before you. While you remain on your own and isolated, you will never acquire love for the Institute and for your companions, and you will be like a soldier who quits the ranks: you will never learn to overcome yourself and arrive at the true imitation of Christ, which is completely summed up in the words: *if anyone wants to follow me, he must deny himself*.

You say that the lack of active life leaves you exposed to temptations. But the greatest temptation is the one which attracts you to an active life not laid down by obedience. Moreover it is certain that anyone who is obedient and carries out his duties, persevering in his vocation, is under God's protection; and God will not allow him to be tempted beyond his strength. What gives rise to these temptations is our wanting things we ought not to want, and failing to cling to obedience and our vocation with our whole heart and all our strength. But if they arise involuntarily, they are to be seen as part of the trials that God sends us to purify us, and we must thank him for them. For the greater the temptation, the greater the merit when we resist it.

⁴⁶ Rosmini had left Genoa together with Frs. Gentili, Pagani, Puecher, Setti, Gilardi and Toscani, and had gone by sea to Livorno [Leghorn], where Belisy joined them. After staying for two days in Livorno the group left for Civitavecchia, and arrived in Rome on the vigil of the Assumption. On the octave day of the feast, 22 August, they all made their vows as Presbyters in the catacombs of San Sebastian, at the underground altar of the saint. (cf. the *Vita di A. Rosmini*, vel. 11, pp.1617).

So put your trust in Jesus Christ, in obedience and in your vocation. God will give you the grace: he will not allow you to be turned aside by any thought, any desire, that does not come from him; for he does not contradict himself, and anything that would lead you away from him can be nothing but a deceit of the devil, who sometimes disguises himself as an angel of light. You will be enabled to gain the victory if you but reflect on your duties and offer up a fervent prayer.

It is all the more necessary for you to return immediately to San Michele because Don Carlo [Gilardi] has to go to Rome and will be away for some weeks. I am sure you will see from this letter that I need to be consoled by you. Pray for me too, who am from my heart

Yours affectionately,

ROSMINI p.

104. To Don G. B. Pagani⁴⁷ at Domodossola

Rome, 4 September 1839

My dear brother and companion in *God's service*,

To my sorrow I find that my departure from Rome has to be postponed from day to day, because I cannot yet obtain the blessing of the Holy Father, and with it permission to leave. I have several times had the honour of presenting myself to His Holiness, and I shall be going again to see him this evening. I am sure he will receive me with his customary extreme kindness and will speak with me at some length. But he will not let me leave yet. This, my dear brother, is a great cross; but it must be borne with humble resignation to the will of God. I was perhaps over-optimistic in hoping to be with you before you left for England, and now the Lord is mortifying my wish. Certainly you should not delay your departure for England by waiting for me to arrive; and so I give you my blessing and let you leave any time from now on, since I especially want to keep my promise to Mgr Baines that you should be with him by the end of the month. I embrace you all, and in particular the two English priests⁴⁸, in charity and in the Holy Spirit. Don Luigi is to remain in Italy and prepare himself to teach philosophy, without other occupations. Tell him this. Lorrain is to come instead with the rest of you, provided that you and Belisy, after examining him carefully, find him suitable for this mission. I should not like Mgr Baines to be displeased over my keeping Gentili in Italy, so persuade him that I did so in the belief that he would be glad about this; and you are to give him the enclosed letter as proof of this.

Urge all the brethren to fervour and zeal for *God's glory*, to the study of our holy Institute, to mutual charity and to resignation to *God's will*. There are so many things that I should like to have said to our two dear Englishmen, whom I caused to come from so far away so that I could talk to them! There were so many conversations I wanted to have with Belisy about the Institute and about philosophy! But *God* did not wish this to happen just now. May he be blessed. My fondest greetings to those at Calvario and to the others - I shall be writing to them very soon. I hope that before you leave not only will you write to me, but also that all the others who have to go will add a line or two in your letter. It will console me to know how they feel. Goodbye.

Your most affectionate brother in Christ,

ROSMINI p.

⁴⁷ The day after the vows were taken, Pagani and his companions left Rome for Piedmont. Only Rosmini and Setti remained in Rome, in order to seek some clarifications over the Apostolic Letters approving the Institute, and to thank the Holy Father again.

⁴⁸ Fr Moses Furlong and Fr James Shepherd.

105. To Cardinal Castracane in Rome

Stresa, 1 October 1839

Your Eminence,

It is my duty, and my heart urges me even more, to write the first letter following my return here to Your Eminence, so as to express again my boundless gratitude for all the favours and kindnesses you showed us during our stay in Rome. We feel more obliged than ever to regard you as a most notable benefactor of our Institute. The only recompense I can promise you for so much goodness is my own poor prayers and the prayers of my companions, who all feel how great is our indebtedness to you. I beg you, when next you see the Holy Father, to renew to him our most sincere and heartfelt gratitude for the fatherly kindness and charity with which he received us and for the many favours he heaped on us. We are all of us utterly convinced that it is our duty to obey His Holiness in everything and to serve the Church according to the wishes of its Head on earth. Hence it is my hope that in the Lord's goodness the few or many members that the Institute has or will have in the future will do all in their power to lead Christ's flock, united in heart, to the universal Shepherd, the successor of St Peter.

By God's grace I have found all my affairs here in good order, and all my brethren extremely happy over the Brief we have been granted. All of us, and especially Don Roberto, offer you our deepest respects, while begging you to continue your most precious benevolence towards us and to commend us to the Lord.

With all respect, veneration and esteem,

Your most humble, grateful and obedient servant,

ROSMINI p.

106. To a cleric at Bra

Stresa, 1 October 1839

My dear Sir,

It is difficult to give a clear idea of the Institute of Charity in a letter, but it is enough to say that its aim is the greatest possible perfection taught in the gospel by our Lord Jesus Christ, and it requires of those who aspire to join it great charity and a desire to do good, together with perfect obedience and an indifference to any position which Superiors may assign for the greater glory of God. So the disposition needed in those wishing to join it is a *most pure and lofty intention*. Anyone who thought of entering it but was intent on being ordained a priest would not have a vocation to the Institute. Instead the sole aim must be that of sacrificing oneself for God's sake under the direction of obedience.

If you are really moved by such pure and high motives, then after praying to the Lord come to Monte Calvario, Domodossola: there you will receive all the information you want. But notice that you must bring with you certificates of baptism and confirmation, a properly attested record of all your studies, the permission of your Bishop to enter the Institute, a certificate of good conduct from the Rector of the seminary, a certificate concerning the state of your health from a doctor, and finally a reference from the mayor or some other civil authority.

If all these things are in order, you could well be accepted into the Institute, even if you have no temporal possessions. With my respects, I remain

Your humble servant,

ROSMINI p.

107. To Mr Ambrose Phillips in England

Stresa, 1 October 1839

My dear friend in Christ. . .

Your letter reached me in Rome, and I can hardly tell you how consoled I was to hear from you, after a long time without any direct news of my dear Phillips. It was all the more welcome because it was full of that sweet unction which the Holy Spirit imparts to you, as well as a burning zeal for the conversion of your homeland, England - for which I pray daily as if it were my own country. This is because I love it as part of the Mystical Body of Christ; and I am confident that he will incorporate it and unite it to that Body, as he is doing more and more as the days go by.

I approve wholeheartedly of the holy plan that you put to me, and your request for Father Gentili⁴⁹. I am sure the plan will succeed, even though at the start difficulties will not be lacking, as always happens with holy works. I cannot send Fr Gentili at once, since he is a little unwell, and so I did not let him return to England with our other brethren. It seems to me, though, that this was a wonderful disposition of divine Providence, his remaining in Italy; since it means that I will be able to accede to your request without causing displeasure to anyone. Another good thing is that the secular priest whom you offered to me as his companion now shows a certain desire to enter the Institute. This gives me good hopes that he is a man of excellent spirit. If God does not offer him this vocation, it will be necessary in due course for Gentili to receive as companion one of our brethren, since the Rules of the Institute do not allow members to remain alone in the company of secular priests, unless these are present simply as guests. But since the priest in question shows an inclination to join the Institute, I am prepared to make an exception, for the sake of my dear friend Phillips - at any rate until this priest's vocation has been put to the test. In the meantime, it is enough if Gentili can have a laybrother with him, without any increase in what (in your kindness) you are willing to contribute for the maintenance of Gentili alone.

But what, my dear Phillips, may be of great benefit to the Church in England, and have incalculable good results, is the noble thought that you tell me about in your letter: that you wish to found in time a regular house of the Institute in your country. Then a noviciate house could be set up in which to form, in holiness and an apostolic spirit, native English priests. They could then be given a suitable training in sacred studies, and so there would emerge able men who could then, with that house as a centre, spread the true faith and solid piety to all other parts of the island, wherever God in his Providence and especially through the voice of the bishops should call them to. This is the great work to

⁴⁹ Ambrose Phillips had asked to have Gentili for the Grace Dieu mission.

which we must devote our thoughts if we wish to lay a sound foundation for this admirable enterprise. . .

Pray for me, my dear Phillips, and write to me soon if you are satisfied with what I have said. I am ever, in the hearts of Jesus and Mary

Your affectionate friend,

ROSMINI p.

108. To the Sister of Providence Monica Milizia in Locarno

Stresa, 6 October 1839

My dear daughter in Christ,

You did well to share with me the consolations you have received: I rejoiced in them in spirit and thanked the Lord for them. We have to humble ourselves if he is so good as to treat us generously, especially since we treat him so badly. I hope the time will come when I can console you with the favour you ask - of having the Blessed Sacrament close at hand. I am at present having made ready the tribune where you will be able to adore the Lord; and the rest will follow.

As for your request about visiting the parish church in the evenings: this is something that a Sister should never ask for. Rather she should always act like the rest of the community, for the sake of good order and uniformity with her Sisters. Have great confidence: the Lord will make you realize more and more how great a grace it is to be his bride. Human thought is unable to take in this privilege, nor can any tongue thank him sufficiently for it. Goodbye.

Your father in Christ,

ROSMINI p.

109. To the Sister of Providence Maria Cucco in Locarno

Stresa, 6 October 1839

My dear daughter in Christ,

As scripture says, one does not get to heaven except by enduring many temptations. So do not be frightened by the temptations that God allows you to be subject to in order to humble and purify you. Do not think that you have lost your way: rather, *this is your way*. God wants you to carry the cross, to overcome yourself, and to have great confidence in him alone. For ten months he has caused you to savour his consolations: so if you have received good things at his hands, why are you unwilling to receive bad things? Temptations are no sin, but means by which to obtain an immortal reward. You are the bride of Jesus Christ, and you must know that he never abandons one who is his bride, but lets her experience temptation to test her love for him. Goodbye.

Your father in Christ,

ROSMINI p.

110. To the Sister of Providence Cecilia Deleani in Locarno

Stresa, 6 October 1839

My dear daughter in Christ,

Set a high value on your vocation and the Lord will be with you: he will perhaps make use even of you to do great good to your neighbour, since he is pleased to employ for his works such wretched instruments as ourselves, his poor creatures. Make it your concern to follow your Creator and Redeemer with simplicity, as the little lamb follows anyone who draws it by the salt in his hand. Your Bridegroom has the salt of wisdom: take account only of this, and pay no attention to anything else, whether consolations or trials. When everything is going well, say: 'Soon the cross will come.' And when everything seems to be going badly, say: 'Soon I shall receive comfort from my Lord.' Study and learn as well as you can, so that you will be the better able to serve Jesus Christ in the children and the needy. Goodbye.

Your father in Christ,

ROSMINI p.

111. To Don Francesco Paoli at Domodossola

Stresa, 8 October 1839

My dear brother in Christ,

I read your letter with much spiritual joy, and I thanked the Lord because during the retreat he communicated to you some spark of the beauty of his law and of his will. I am very willing to satisfy your wish to get to know the Institute in all its fulness by allowing you to read the Constitutions. I will let you have them as soon as I have a copy available. For the rest, my dear brother, let us hope to receive great things from God, and long to do great things for him. This means doing all that he wills - neither more nor less. This alone is really great, and everything else is trivial or nothing at all. One day we shall be able to say to our Lord: 'You were my guide on the journey.'

I hope to embrace you soon - as soon as the roads are open again. I pray God that the damage caused by the flooding of the Ossola may not be as great as is feared. We have had no news at all from Domodossola for several days.

Meanwhile, fondest regards to you and all my dear brethren in the Lord, while I recommend myself greatly to the charity of your prayers. Goodbye, goodbye.

Yours,

ROSMINI p.

112. To the Sister of Providence M. Veronica in Locarno

Stresa, 13 October 1839

My dear daughter in Christ,

Charity, and the fruit that is to be hoped for from it, must be the considerations that determine the actions of a Superior towards her Sisters. So it is not possible to give a general rule over the case you tell me about. Sometimes it is better to wait until those who are disturbed or distressed spontaneously open themselves up; and sometimes it is preferable to question them and lovingly invite them to speak. Holy discretion and spiritual prudence must be our guides in these matters, while we try to act with great uprightness of intention, quite without self-love and moved only by zeal for the spiritual welfare of the Sisters. We have to ask God in prayer for the light we need to guide us in individual cases. Above all, make sure that you act in such a way that your Sisters put great trust in you - and here it helps if you treat them very gently. Goodbye. Pray for me. I too pray that the Lord will bless you.

A. R.

113. To the Sister of Providence Matilde Stedile at Domodossola

Stresa, 18 October 1839

My dear daughter in Christ,

Be quite certain that it is the devil who is disturbing you: you must never give in to him, but must remain constant to the end in your vocation. I hope you will realize this yourself once the temptation has passed, and so make use of this knowledge in similar circumstances in the future. The house you are living in is the house of your Bridegroom Jesus; so you must love it with all your heart, look on your Institute as an infinite treasure and see your holy vocation as an inestimable gift. Our Lord has told us: 'The kingdom of God suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.' So you must overcome yourself, and put to silence all the suggestions of self-love, for they do not come from God. Our Blessed Lady will help you if you often appeal to her. So I urge you to serve God in your present situation with the *generosity* of his true servants.

Perhaps you are now in retreat: this is the time to renew your fervour, as the iron is heated in the fire, and to make yourself pliable, so as to receive the form that God wants you to take. Goodbye.

Your affectionate father in Christ,

R. p.

114. To Brother Enrico Arnaldo Fehr⁵⁰ at Calvario

Stresa, 7 November 1839

My dear Arnaldo,

From the letters you have sent me it is clear that your heart is greatly set on giving yourself totally to the service of the Lord. How delightful is this service, and how happy it must make us: compared to it all the dominions and thrones of this world are as mud! I am quite sure that the loving God who has brought you from darkness into light has infused in you such holy desires, and has opened to you his house where you can live and die, in and for his love, will complete through his all-powerful grace the admirable work he has begun in you. But, my dear Arnaldo, we must couple a limitless trust in his immense goodness with a great distrust of ourselves, in view of our extreme weakness and wretchedness.

We know well that it is not our aim simply to admire virtue at a distance, so to speak: rather, we must make it a reality in practice; we have to show it in action, clothe ourselves in it. Yet how hard this is, given our poor human limitations! Still, it is in this very difficulty - which we can overcome through faith and constancy, or rather which God in us will overcome - it is in this that there consists the great glory that St Paul speaks of: 'Let him who glories glory in the Lord.'

I shall be very pleased if after a while you will send me a detailed account of all the activities of the noviciate, and tell me something of the great work in which you are engaged, hidden away from the world: a work which aims at nothing less than the detachment of your soul from all things, even from life, even from your own self. Oh blessed poverty of spirit! Truly, 'Blessed are the poor' - or rather, 'Blessed are those who die in the Lord!' But we do not arrive at this putting off of nature unless we pass through the fire of temptation. It may be that God has not yet employed this means with you. So maintain a burning fervour, in simplicity and peace, yet omitting nothing that can prepare you for the fight.

Continue to love me in the Lord, and pray for

Your affectionate though unworthy father in Christ,

A. R.

⁵⁰ Fehr joined the Institute in September 1839 and left it in March 1845.

115. To Don Alessio Martin at the Sagra di San Michele

Stresa, 17 November 1839

My dear brother in our Lord Jesus Christ. . .

I have told Padre Molinari, the new Rector of that house, various things by word of mouth concerning what is contained in your letter of 11 October. But I can do no less as I write to you than add an exhortation and a plea that you will resolve to arrive at those solid virtues that are always blessed by God, and especially at *obedience* - since the Holy Spirit says: 'The obedient man will speak of victories.' If you want to advance directly towards your eternal salvation, you should have no other counsellors than your Superiors, to whom you have promised obedience before Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. To ask for any other counsel, even from people who are, as you say, holy and learned, is a *fault*, and the very way to expose yourself to temptation and fall into the devil's snares. The channel through which you must hear the voice of God is solely that of your Superiors. If you seek advice from anyone else, God will allow those you consult to be deceived and lead you into error. So take the sure way, and *trust in God*, who will give you the strength to overcome yourself, provided that you pray every day for this intention. Engrave on your heart the golden words of Thomas a Kempis: 'The more you master yourself, the greater will be your progress in virtue.' And as I said, pray to God for grace - you may be sure that you will be heard. Console me with good news of yourself, so that I may see that you are building your house on rock. Goodbye.

Yours affectionately in Christ,

A. ROSMINI p.

116. To Baron Isaaco Eccaro at Innsbruck

Stresa, 27 November 1839

My dear Isaaco,

Your most welcome letter has reached me, and I am only now replying to it because I have only just received it. May God send you every blessing. Be faithful to him, and be ready always to face death rather than commit sin. If you take greater precautions against sin than against death you will be a happy man: God will show you the road you must follow, and he will lead you by the hand. But in order to flee from sin and so make progress under God's protection, this means that you must have a great fear of bad example and evil language. Unfortunately, there in the university you are bound to see and hear such things! But if you conceive a great abhorrence for them from the first moment you meet with them, not taking the slightest notice of them, you will overcome in everything, or rather God in you will bring this about - for without him no man can win this struggle.

I am sure your studies will go well, very well. But this is the least important thing, my dear Isaaco: woe to the learned man who is not virtuous: it is a thousand times better to be ignorant rather than a sinner. Write again, always opening your heart to me, and so give me pleasure. Goodbye.

Yours,

ROSMINI p.

117. To Don G. B. Pagani at Prior Park

Stresa, 8 December 1839

My dear brother in our Lord Jesus Christ. . .

As regards poverty, the subject of your letter, I recommend first of all instilling the love of it in all our brethren, extolling its excellence in the light and the spirit of that lover of poverty, St Francis of Assisi. Secondly, to the best of your ability see that it is practised. Avoid any sort of superfluity; never waste the least thing, even a piece of paper. The brethren should never spoil anything or consume anything needlessly. As for things that are necessary in the country they are in, let them always choose what is most economical; and be sure the need is real, not imaginary. If you feel that a single thread is superfluous, take it away. In case of doubt, hear what your two consultors have to say, and do whatever two votes agree over. The theologians who treat of religious poverty in general cannot resolve the cases which arise over our practice of poverty, which is of a special kind. So when some matter of importance arises, write to me, putting the question, and I will give you an answer. Since our poverty must be a reality, not just a matter of words, you should test its genuineness in these ways:

(1) By a frequent exchange of rooms (if this can be done), and of belongings, especially those which you think people are attached to;

(2) By the practice of the 'handing over' which is to take place during the first year of the noviciate (as well as on entry into the noviciate, if this is prudent). This consists in the novice's handing over to the Superior all the little things he makes daily use of (books, penknife and so on). Then, when he has given up everything, he asks for a loan of what he needs, out of charity; and the Superior lets him have what he needs, but not his own things (except for clothes), which will be given to others. This is a most useful practice, if carried out properly and in the right spirit.

(3) By introducing the practice of asking the favour of being deprived of some article of which one is particularly fond, permission to wear the roughest or most uncomfortable or badly-cut clothing, according to what is most distasteful to the one concerned.

I shall send you three decrees later which will prove quite helpful in the observance of holy poverty. You will also receive soon the Apostolic Letters, which have now been printed. Warmest regards, and my blessing to all. May God's grace be with you. Amen.

A. ROSMINI p.

118. To Don Giuseppe Roberto Setti at Domodossola

Stresa, 21 December 1839

My dear Roberto,

I would not like you to change the practice of giving food to the poor to giving them alms instead, with a view to dealing with things in the most convenient way and in the apparent interests of good order and regularity, of getting things done quickly, and so on. If such motives as these are at work I would oppose the change. I have a high regard for the sort of exercise of charity which involves personal service of the poor of Jesus Christ. This, if it is done in the right spirit, is meritorious, and at the same time brings us happiness and helps us towards perfection. So this practice is a precious one in a noviciate, where there are few opportunities for *personal employment* in humble tasks in the service of others. So pass on to the Father Master these views of mine. I particularly recommend this occasion of employing the novices in humble service of the poor, and so leading them to have a great love of holy poverty.

If anyone of them asks for clothing or anything else, make sure before you give these things that he has had permission from the Superior.

Fondest regards to yourself and to all the others. May Jesus be born in your hearts, or rather may he grow within you by new graces every day. Goodbye.

Yours,

ROSMINI p.

119. To the novice Matilde Stedile at Domodossola

Stresa, Christmas Day 1839

My dear daughter in Christ,

I was very pleased to hear that the Lord is giving you ever more light to see and appreciate the immense grace he has given you in choosing you for his bride. Your situation is such that nothing more is required of you than that you love him and serve him in your neighbour. Jesus Christ has said: 'Whatever you do for the least of my brethren, you do for me.' These *little ones of*

Christ will for you be especially the children whom in due course you will be teaching. What a noble ministry God has given you! Anyone who does not appreciate it has no love for God; whoever is not zealous to do good to others does not love Jesus Christ. What sort of *love* would it be that was unwilling to do anything for the loved one? The Sisters must be spiritual brides of Christ in reality, not just in words. So the proof of your love for your Spouse consists in bearing willingly the labours and trials which you will meet with in his service - that is, in the service of your neighbour and the care you will show to the little children. Courage therefore! Today is the birthday of the Lord: oh, may the Child Jesus take possession of you for all eternity. Goodbye.

Your father in Christ,

R.

120. To William Agar in England

Stresa, 28 December 1839

My dear brother in Christ,

With great pleasure I welcome you into the Institute of Charity. Perfect yourself in all solid virtues, so that you may be a disciple of the one Master. This is the sole desire of us all, to be *perfected in unity*. This unity of hearts, made one in God, must be our whole strength.

I shall be very pleased to hear, from our dear Pagani and yourself, of your progress in every kind of virtue, so I hope that you will write to me again. Meanwhile I wish you every kind of blessing. Pray for me.

Yours affectionately,

ROSMINI p.

121. To Pietro Zencher at Prior Park

Stresa, 29 December 1839

My dear Pietro della Carità,

May God bless and console you. I approve of what you say in your letter, except that I leave you to the direction of your Father Superior over the quantity of your prayers, so that he may make sure that they are not excessive, and do not become too great a burden for your bodily strength. For the rest, continue to pray with your present intentions, for these are good. God will not fail to hear you. He is very near you and cares for you. The same is true of our Blessed Lady, our dearest and sweetest Mother. Earthly sweetness is bitterness by comparison, not worthy to be compared with her sweetness. So always be happy and serve the Lord joyfully, singing his praises in all you do. I do not tell you to pray for me, your poor father, since your letter shows that we are agreed over this and will always be so.

Fondest regards on my own behalf and on that of all your brethren here, for we are of one heart.

Your father,

ROSMINI p.

122. To Don G. B. Boselli at Domodossola

Stresa, 6 January 1840

My dear Boselli . . .

Speak frankly of everything that seems good to you, and do not hold it back. By acting like this you will gain in true virtue. In the first place, to make it known is an act of love, because of your good intention in doing what is good; and in the second place, it is an act of obedience and submission, and this is something very precious in God's eyes. But what is even more important is the act of humility you perform when you show cheerfulness and indifference in face of rebuffs, submitting your own judgement to that of your Superior. This is real virtue, and we must never miss an opportunity of practising it by overcoming ourselves and denying self. So I recommend you to be both completely open with both your Father Superior and your Father Master, always ready to accept a refusal of any request. So pray beforehand about the matter and dispose yourself to wish for a refusal. In fact before you speak to them it is well to be ready to have your request denied for the sake of being mortified. This is an admirable exercise of religious virtue, and greatly pleasing to God: it results in much charity.

Thank you for your news. Fondest regards in the heart of Jesus.

Yours in Christ,

R. p.

123. To Don Alessio Martin at San Michele

Stresa, 8 January 1840

My dear Father and brother in Christ,

Your letter of the 3rd gave me a sad surprise. You show that you are in two minds about living in Italy. But if we decide for ourselves where we ought to live, are we not going directly against our vow of religious obedience, and especially against the special vow of our Institute, which requires indifference *to any place*, as the Rules make clear? Have you read properly the *Memorial of the First Probation* and the other rules which expressly speak of these things? Take note that the sacrifice which we must make to the Lord, and which we have in fact made through our vows, must be like that of Jesus Christ on the cross, our model and example. Did Jesus perhaps say to his heavenly Father: 'I do not want to live in Judaea, because I feel depressed there, or because I am in danger of death there'? No, on the contrary, he was *obedient even unto death*. Notice also that the Fathers, such as St Basil and St Thomas, again teach that religious obedience is obligatory until death itself. It is no use saying: 'I did not mean to take on these obligations when I took my vows', since this would be too easy a way to release oneself from so sacred a responsibility - above all after hearing all the instructions on the rules which made quite clear the force of the vows.

My dear brother, surely you do not want to be so ungenerous towards the Lord, or to take a step which on your deathbed might disturb the peace of your conscience? It is true that you could find advisers and even theologians who would go along with your imperfections and passions; but such counsels, grounded on subtle reasonings, would avail you little before God's judgement-seat. Allow me to speak freely. You will never experience peace of mind until the sacrifice which you make of yourself to God is *entire and perfect*; and it will never be these things unless you have the generosity to break free from all attachments both to yourself and to the world, and to bind yourself to God alone. 'My God and my All' must be your motto and the motto of us all. When you put yourself into God's hands (as you have done through your holy vows and your profession in the Institute), then you must remain with constancy and tranquillity in those hands, whether you live or die. God certainly never abandons those who trust entirely in him and receive from him through their Superior whatever he sends them. This abandonment to divine Providence is essential in our Institute, and there is no true sacrifice, no true imitation of Christ, without it. Anyone who thinks differently is thinking in a human way and deceiving himself. If God sees that it is for the greater good not of your body but of your soul that you should lead an active life, then he will arrange for this to happen. If he sees that this is not the case, he will arrange matters accordingly. He may even allow you to be afflicted by some nervous disorder,

since *virtue is made perfect in infirmity*. And if you remain faithful to your vocation and endure the trials the Lord sends you (trials which are never too great for your strength, provided that you pray), you will become holy and dear in his eyes, for *the obedient man will speak of victories*. God knows what need you have of an active life; and if this is necessary for the good of the soul rather than of the body, he will certainly provide it for one who is faithful, but not for an unfaithful servant.

There is a danger that in these matters the imagination may play a great part, and we are often deceived by it; but we have to resist such fantasies courageously, opposing them with the shield of faith. But imagination could never work in us if we were detached from ourselves, from our native land, from our friends and acquaintances, from our own comfort and from earthly possessions. So we must forcibly break off these attachments, and then our imagination will have no scope to work in us. We shall then be able to sing: 'the snare is broken and we are set free.'

The devil deceives us with the attraction of an apostolic life; but can there be any apostolic life without solid virtues? Or without obedience and poverty? The apostles were *sent*; and how can an apostolate be exercised by a religious who has not received a mandate from his Superiors, or who says: 'I want to exercise an apostolate so as to ward off a nervous attack,' or who is unwilling to leave his nets and his boat? St Paul was afraid that after preaching to others he might find himself a castaway. This shows us that apostolic works are not to be taken on simply out of our own inclination, or because we have a taste for them and find satisfaction in them, but only when this is the will of God and he *sends* us. If then your Superiors give you a mission, you do well to listen to them and to go, because 'He who hears you hears me'. But if you simply want to go on your own initiative, or try to find someone else to send you, you will have to render an account to God; and the judgement he will pass on your actions will be inescapable. *I did not send them, yet they went*.

When we undertake the great task of instructing others, we ought to be afraid and tremble, as St Augustine and all the other saints did. Let us rather want to see to our own conversion, and so *prepare ourselves for the apostolate*, rather than actually undertaking it; and having converted ourselves, be better placed to convert others - when and how the Lord wishes. If we have overcome ourselves, overcome temptations, sacrificed our inclinations, made ourselves perfect in obedience and self-denial, *then* we shall have made ourselves fit instruments in the hands of God, and we may hope that *perhaps* he will make use of us to do some good. But while we are so imperfect, full of our own will, relying on our own judgement, so little mortified, we have only too much reason to fear for ourselves. The only true apostle is the man who is ready to wait for the heavenly mission in imitation of Christ, who spent thirty years in the obscurity of a hidden life. This is the virtue that does not deceive us, because

it does not flatter our self-esteem; the virtue that we priests of the Institute of Charity have resolved to practise.

So take courage, my dear brother in the Lord! Let everything go - life, possessions, our wishes, our particular judgements; but never let true virtue go: the gospel virtue, the apostolic virtue which forms the essence of our profession. We must give up every other thought and wish except that of becoming *true members of the Institute of Charity*. Let this one intention preoccupy you - more than it has done in the past. The genuine member of the Institute is content in any place, in any grade, any position, because he seeks only God. He detaches himself from everything else. Our poverty must be complete and absolute, like that of Jesus Christ on the cross.

I could never allow one of our brethren to administer his own goods, and even less permit him to dispose of them or prevent the Institute from disposing of them, since I should thereby gravely sin myself against the vow [of poverty] and cause my companions to sin, by consenting to their imperfection.

Therefore I beg you, my dear brother in Christ, and more than that I *command you in virtue of holy obedience* (take note) to hand over faithfully all that you have in this world to your Superior, in such a way that nothing whatsoever may remain for you to dispose of or administer, so that you may be entirely freed from such involvement and be able to serve the Lord in true and total poverty, so fulfilling the will of God for you. Once you are completely stripped of earthly goods, the power of the grace of God will grow in you; and thus strengthened, with your mind enlightened by him, you will never cease to bless his name for the great benefit he has granted you.

In the meanwhile, unworthy as I am, I will pray to God for you, and I hope that in your next letter you will restore to me the consolation that your previous one took away from me, because of the genuine solicitude that I have for your soul. Goodbye.

Your brother and servant in Christ,

A. R.

124. To Domenico N. at Domodossola

Stresa, 12 January 1840

. . . The name 'Domenico' means 'of the Lord'; and you, my dear brother, must be this in fact as well as in name. But we cannot belong to the Lord and to ourselves at one and the same time, for we cannot serve two masters. So when you ask me what weapons you can use to overcome your enemies, my answer is that you have to give yourself into the Lord's hands as if you had no life of your own. And when you are *God's* victim in this way, do you think that he will be unable to defend one who is his own from his enemies? But while you are on your own, it is up to you to defend yourself; and how will you fare in your wretchedness when it comes to protecting yourself from the monsters which surround you so as to devour you? I do not see how you can. So the best thing is for you to cease entirely to belong to yourself. To this end, place yourself in the hands of your Superiors, who will receive you in the name of God whom, as you know, they represent. And hand yourself over with total *sincerity*, denying your own judgement, entirely *stripping yourself* and becoming poor in spirit, and finally with a great desire to *suffer* and to work hard. After this you will truly be 'Domenico'.

These then are my wishes for you: here are my New Year greetings! Truly you will be a happy man if you become a genuine son of the Institute of Charity, a real disciple of Christ, who died naked on the cross, and told us that anyone who wishes to follow him must first *deny himself*. Everything is contained in these words. I am impatient to see you become perfect: so hasten your progress with noble resolution. I await further accounts from you telling me of the steps you have taken along the road you have begun to travel - the one that leads to perfection and paradise.

Yours affectionately in Christ,

A. ROSMINI p.

125. To Sister Monica, Sister of Providence, at Domodossola

Stresa, 14 January 1840

My dear daughter in Christ,

In reply to your question: if you love your Spouse, Jesus, you must greatly want to please him. (If you do not want to please him it is a sign that you do not love him.) You will ask me anxiously how you are to please him; and my immediate answer is: *do* what is pleasing to him. But what will please him? One thing above all: OBEDIENCE. Here then is the short cut to pleasing Jesus, and to showing love for him in practice, not just in words.

So when the Superior tells you to remain seated in church, then you please your Spouse by doing so; whereas if you kneel down, you do not. When your Superior forbids you to receive Holy Communion, and you happily carry out what obedience calls for, then you please Jesus. But if you do receive Holy Communion, or only sadly and grudgingly do as you are told, then you do not please your Jesus. When your Mother will not allow you to take the discipline during the week, or carry out any other penance, and you cheerfully, with no trace of sadness, carry out the command, then you please Jesus. But if you are downhearted about omitting the penance, or are sad and reluctant to obey, then you fail to please Jesus - in fact you displease him. When you go to your dear Mother's room and trustingly tell her all your defects and troubles, so as to receive correction and helpful advice from her, and to get to know your Superior's will and carry it out, then you greatly please Jesus. But if you do the opposite of these things, how can you please your Spouse?

In short, a soul does not please Jesus by kneeling down, or receiving Holy Communion frequently, or performing external penances, but rather by denying self, by promptly and cheerfully obeying. Everything else is vanity: it is self-love; it is ignorance; it is a deception of the devil. My dear daughter, this is the truth of the matter. So now you know. It will be clear that you really love Jesus Christ if you act according to this truth and put it into practice with simplicity and no second thoughts. Goodbye. Serve the Lord with happiness and joy; and always pray for

Your affectionate father,

A. ROSMINI p.

PS Show this letter to your dear Mother Superior.

Translator's note: this letter of course needs to be read in the light of what was current Church practice in Rosmini's day for instance over reception of Holy Communion, even by religious.

126. To all the members of the Institute of Charity: the grace of Christ. Amen.

Stresa, 15 January 1840

United as we are in the love of Christ so as to help one another to become more worthy of eternal life and to attain it, we are bound to render one another mutual service as long as we are pilgrims in this world. So too we must, according to the spirit of the Society, pray in a special way for the souls of those who go before us on the great journey to eternity. Hence it is right that when one of our own passes to the next life, those who remain should be informed, so that by their prayers and sacrifices they may obtain from the divine mercy remission for the soul of their dear companion of whatever faults (committed through human frailty) remain to be atoned for, and so a speedier admission to the beatific vision of God.

Since it has pleased the Lord to call from this life the first of our Ascribed Members, our Reverend Father Monsignor Carlo Emmanuelle De' Sardagna, formerly Bishop of Cremona and lately Titular Archbishop of Caesarea, who went to the eternal repose of the just (as his eminent piety and signal merits in the Church lead us to hope) on the 12th of this month at Rovereto, it is our duty, my dear brothers in Christ, to pray with all our strength and in every way for the soul of one who was joined to us with the close ties of ascription, and to whom we are very greatly indebted by reason of the affection in which he always held the Institute and its members. Mgr Sardagna was one of those prelates, both holy and wise, who even before our Institute was submitted to the authority of the Holy Apostolic See and by this solemnly confirmed, did not hesitate by a formal decree to give it his approval. Hence the name of this Father in Christ will always be remembered and honoured by the whole Society. With these considerations in mind, then in addition to the usual annual suffrages that are customarily offered by our Society on behalf of its deceased members:

- (1) In all our churches a Requiem Mass and the whole Office of the Dead will be offered on the first free day after the receipt of this letter;
- (2) The soul of our illustrious Ascribed Member will receive the suffrages of all our religious, in the form of whatever prayers are prescribed by the Superiors of the various houses;
- (3) By this letter all our Ascribed Members are invited and requested to pray for the soul of their venerable confrere in whatever way their charity may suggest, in the certain hope of receiving an abundant reward when for them too their last hour arrives

ANTONIO ROSMINI-SERBATI,

Provost General of the Institute of Charity

127. To Don Francesco Puecher at Domodossola

Stresa, 15 January 1840

My dear brother in Christ,

I am not happy about the laybrothers' noviciate. Piety within it ought to be ardent, *yes*, but at the same time it must be solid, and based above all on the great No. 11⁵¹ of the Common Rules. Otherwise it will be a mere delusion. I fear greatly that the axe is not being laid to the root of the tree. Devotions should not be left to *arbitrary* judgement, apart from ejaculatory prayers during the day. All other prayers should be decided by the Superior, for all and sundry. Otherwise the individual Brother will impose on himself a huge and indiscreet mass of prayers; he will become attached to them and feel they are necessary. He will then be uneasy if he is unable to say them all; he will feel downcast and even resentful towards Superiors if they impede him from saying them; and a great many other spiritual evils will follow.

The main quality our Brothers should show must be that of being *hardworking*, and of being united with God as they work.

There should be a fire of love within them; but that should be fed mainly by the thought and intention of *labouring* and suffering for the love of God. Anyone who cannot be fervent in carrying out his duties does not live up to the true image of a laybrother of the Institute.

Yours in Christ,

A. R.

⁵¹ For reference, here is No. 11 of the Common Rules: 'The chief and most solid work of piety consists in striving by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ to carry out more perfectly day by day all that is required of us by our state or grade, so as to join our lives ever more closely to God our Lord, in order that they may eventually become a continual service and a total sacrifice to his divine majesty. The more closely we bind ourselves to God, and the more generous we are with him, the more generous he will be with us, and we shall become better prepared to receive his graces and a fuller measure of spiritual gifts.'

128. To the Sister of Providence Margarita Rovere at Domodossola

Stresa, 27 January 1840

My dear daughter in Christ,

You will achieve nothing unless you follow what I am about to say to you. First of all, you must go against your own thoughts and feelings when they are opposed to those of your Superior or Mistress. Jesus Christ has told us to deny ourselves; and any Sister who does not love contradiction is not denying herself. Contradiction is the greatest good in the eyes of a spiritual person. But neither the world nor human nature likes to be contradicted.

You are called to follow Christ closely: so why is it that you are so obstinate in following your own will, in believing in your own ideas, in taking correction with an ill grace? You certainly cannot become perfect in a day, and so your lapses and imperfections do not worry me, as long as you sincerely resolve to deny yourself and receive cheerfully and gratefully the corrections given to you, looking on them as the greatest act of charity that can be done to you. Why, then, are you depressed and annoyed when you are corrected? Why do you not welcome gratefully, with tears in your eyes, the care and love of those who correct you? The words with which your Superiors correct you are precious to those who are poor in their own eyes: they are a healing ointment for infirm souls.

It is a great defect to take ill any corrections you receive, because it prevents your soul from drawing any profit from them. I will tolerate patiently any other defects in novices, for I know that you are less than perfect creatures. But I will not put up with a lack of docility in any of our novices - an unwillingness to accept correction, an attachment to her own will. Such a novice cannot have a vocation to the sublime Institute to which you belong, and would instead be unworthy of it, because she was unwilling to correspond with her vocation. Those who sincerely wish to overcome themselves, and who greatly desire that Superiors should correct all their defects - these will certainly succeed: even if they are full of faults, God will help them. Those on the other hand who refuse correction, even if they were to work miracles, deserve to be dismissed from the Institute, in which they would only be a burden and a scandal. For anyone who hates her medicine will never be cured. Pray fervently to God, then, for the grace to be glad when people correct you, and to conform yourself to what corrections teach you. Make every effort over this, and then you will overcome all your spiritual enemies. I shall see, therefore, whether you follow my advice and show good will, resolution and great trust in God.

Your affectionate father in Christ,

ROSMINI p.

129. To the Sister of Providence Luigia Elli at Domodossola

Stresa, 30 January 1840

My dear daughter in Christ,

You must, my daughter, ask God for much light in your duties, and if you do so from your heart he will give it to you. It is possible that there are some novices whose fundamental dispositions are defective; and these have to be dismissed when we have certain or very probable reasons for believing this to be the case. There are other novices who have defects, but only superficial ones; and these are not to be sent away; rather they are to be treated with tolerance and infinite patience and constant charity. But take good note that sometimes the defects of these latter are more trying to our human nature than those of the former. All the same, the first sort must be dismissed without hesitation, even if their lapse is not grave; and the second sort are to be kept despite their very frequent lapses which may appear serious. But you will ask me how to distinguish those who are fundamentally defective from those whose defects are only on the surface. This, my daughter, is a difficult question; and this is why at the outset I recommended you to pray urgently to God so that he may give you the light by which you will be able to read hearts. All the same I will give you a rule which comes from God, since it is drawn from the gospel; and this will be of considerable help in your task - always supposing that you ask enlightenment from the Lord so as to understand it and apply it well. Otherwise it will not avail you. The rule, then, is this: we have to determine whether the person truly wants to please God, even at the cost of any sacrifice whatever. To find this out you have to instruct her, repeat to her in various ways and on different occasions, and try to make her understand that the only way to please the Lord is that taught by Jesus Christ himself: namely, *self-denial*. This means denying one's own will, and in fact wanting to be thwarted, admonished and put right over one's defects; it means wanting to receive humiliation even when one has committed no defect; suffering willingly in order to be like Christ, and putting up cheerfully with both one's own defects and those of others, without being upset; as well as bearing the trials, worries and exertions that go with one's own state and the carrying out of one's duties. You must apply this doctrine of self-denial in various circumstances, and drive it home with both firmness and gentleness. If a novice is able to understand this, relish it, and sincerely wish to obtain from God the grace to put it into practice, then she is fundamentally good, despite her faults and failings. She must be given time; she needs to be supported in her lapses, and encouraged, bringing it about that she may come to have great trust in God and a joyous spirit, so that she may surely obtain what she desires - that is to say, to perfect herself by self-denial.

But if a particular novice does not understand this and appreciate the doctrine of self-denial that has been put to her and explained in detail, and driven home

as being the words of Jesus Christ himself; if she shows lack of interest, if she does not show signs of making every effort to attain the treasure which consists in self-denial and the giving up of all self-will- then such a novice is certainly not meant for the Institute of Providence, even if no great defects are apparent in her; and once you are sure of this, the best thing is to dismiss her.

This is an important and sure rule; but I say again, it is necessary to have light from God in order to understand it and apply it. We must guard against any self-love in the matter; it is not that we dismiss anyone sent to us by God because of the trouble she may cause us through her defects, or because we lack the patience to put up with them: these faults would rather be a further reason for keeping her. The sole reason which justifies sending a novice away is (as I said) that she does not fit in with the aim of the Institute, and especially does not have, in the depths of her soul, a true desire to become like Christ at any price, and to follow - cost what it may the teaching of Christ contained in his words: 'If anyone wants to be my disciple, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.'

So examine the novice you wrote to me about according to this rule; talk over the matter with the Superior (to whom you will show this letter), and then come to a decision. Pray, and have prayers said, as I hope you always do, for

Your affectionate father in Christ,

A. ROSMINI p.

130. To Giacomo Lugan at San Michele

Stresa, 17 February 1840

My dear Giacomo,

I was very pleased to receive your note, and I am equally pleased to reply to it. I am glad to hear that your Fr Rector is pleased with your behaviour. We must continue to thank *God* for this, because all our good comes from him, and he is willing to help us ever more, provided that we give to him alone all honour and glory, are grateful for his blessings, and humbly rejoice in the ocean of his mercies. We have to be fully convinced that virtue consists in overcoming ourselves and conforming our will to that of our divine Master, crucified for love of us. May Jesus be blessed for ever. Let everything we do be done in his name and for his love. Let us all love one another in him and pray for one another.

Yours affectionately in the Lord,

A. ROSMINI p.

131. To Sister Maria Veronica N.

Stresa, 20 February 1840

My dear daughter in Christ,

I urge you to rid yourself entirely of curiosity: this is a weakness unworthy of a servant of the Lord, and a fault against the Rules. It shows disobedience and lack of respect towards Superiors and it is an offence against your companions, who have a right to their privacy. So too it is a lack of charity towards your neighbour, a frivolity which must be left to women in the world, and finally a lack of fidelity, it could be said, to all the duties of your state.

You have chosen God as your one good: so you must not be curious to know anything except him alone. Nothing else is of value. The Institute to which God in his mercy called you has need of *strong women*. How could Superiors place trust in a Sister who cannot overcome herself in this matter of curiosity, and who could perhaps never be reliable in more serious matters?

You see then that this defect is a notable one; and it must be promptly and wholly rooted out of you. So deny your curiosity even in things of small importance, so as to become used to being interested in nothing but God alone and your own duties. Your penance for the fault you have committed is to make a cross on the ground with your tongue for a fortnight, and to make your particular examination of conscience on this point every day. God bless you. Goodbye.

Your affectionate father in Christ,

R. p.

132. To Sister Luigia Elli at Domodossola

Stresa, 20 February 1840

My dear daughter in Christ,

Although there is no need to reply to your letter, I am doing so because I do not want to lose the opportunity to give you some advice which I consider necessary. You say that you expect nothing from the novices whom you are directing except that they should not answer back, and that they should be indifferent over what you tell them to do. What I want to say to you is that in some circumstances what you ask of them supposes in them a greater perfection than can be expected of beginners. If a novice you correct is momentarily upset, tries to excuse herself and answers back - what then? May it not be that basically her disposition is excellent, and that she has a sincere desire to make spiritual progress? This could certainly be so. What you need rather to find out is whether her fault in answering back and getting upset comes of an inner pride, a cold heart lacking spiritual enlightenment, or whether there is nothing of the sort. She might have a good heart and want very much to acquire humility and patience, and yet on top of this show the superficial defect of easily becoming upset and provoked. In this case a good Novice Mistress needs to put up with her behaviour and return to the work of correction later on. To discover if this is the case, see whether the novice who was upset and answered back is very sorry for her fault once she has calmed down, asks pardon, is annoyed with herself, prays and hopes for the grace to improve and promises to do better. You must never give up hope over a novice who has such fundamental dispositions; she must be helped in every way, whether by severity or by gentle treatment, by speaking of God to her, by speaking of her to God, by exercising her in humility, by encouraging her. Reprove her sharply so as to shake her up for a moment, but always support her hope, and console her when you see that she is downhearted.

For the rest, as regards the Sister about whom you wrote to me, I leave the matter entirely to the Superior and yourself. Do what you think best before God, after looking carefully into it all and praying about it. Please get all your novices to offer up a Holy Communion for my intentions. Goodbye.

A. ROSMINI p.

133. To Don Alessio Martin at San Michele

Stresa, 24 February 1840

My dear brother in Christ,

Let us not deceive ourselves. Our sacrifice has to be *entire*; and for this to be so we have to obey, renounce every earthly good, and be crucified, *naked* with Christ on the cross, lacking all human comfort. This is what God says to us: 'Anyone who wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.' This is the force of our vows: this is the only way to ensure the salvation of our souls. What good would it be to convert the whole world, yet fail in our own duties? You must then *obey*: you have to hate yourself - *he who hates his own soul preserves it to everlasting life*. Every other opinion, my dear brother, is an illusion; it is a deception of a false spirit, a carnal and diabolical one. Take care, then, what you do: for the moment of death will come, when necessarily all illusions cease and the time comes to *give an account*.

So in answer to your letter I say first: obey, and obey *entirely*. For God is with those who carry out their duties and abandon themselves to him.

As for the question you put to me: 'Is there any intention of making a foundation in France?', I answer that if God were to open such a door for me I would certainly wish with all my heart to follow the leading of Providence. But at the same time I tell you that to build a house one needs stones; and God can send me these. But up to the present *he has not done so*. The foundation stones of a house must be men who do not waver in their vocation, and who do not say to me after they have taken their vows that they do not understand what was *fully and repeatedly* explained to them; or that they did not know what they were doing. With such stones I can never build anything.

You will see from this that your deplorable *hesitations* in following your holy and certain vocation would render it quite impossible for me to make a foundation in France at present, even should the Lord offer me the opportunity. For the rest, the Institute professes *perfect poverty*, and I cannot in conscience *ever permit* one of our brethren to dispose, of his own will, even of a bit of straw; rather, I require that all should completely strip themselves of their possessions, so as to imitate our Model, and 'naked, follow the naked one.'

I hope that God will give you strength and enlighten you so that you break with yourself, with your own judgement, and with your own will. I pray earnestly for this out of the most sincere charity - in which I warmly embrace you.

A. ROSMINI p.

134. To Don Emilio Belisy at Prior Park

Stresa, Easter, 7 April 1840

My dear Belisy, alleluia, alleluia,

As for writing to me, do so when you wish, and get your letter enclosed with one of Fr Rector's. And as for the defects you observed, you did well to tell me about them. But I am always very afraid of making judgements about *interior* defects in others. I can only recommend you, as strongly I can, never to make such judgements (and vanity is one of these internal defects), but humbly to assume the best about people, and follow the Lord's teaching: 'Do not judge.'

When for some reason we cannot avoid thinking about the *possibility* of an internal fault in one of our brethren, our thought must stop at the *possibility*, and not go as far as passing a judgement. When we take into account this *possibility*, that will be quite enough to determine how we should act. This is the rule I observe myself, and it seems to me a very important one so that we do not offend against charity and justice, and that we live in the humility and union of soul which the Lord taught us. So too it is perfectly in accord with logic.

The chapter *De actione individuali etc.* [in Part IX of the Constitutions] is very important, but its application presents difficulties. It expresses the spirit of our Institute rather than formal rules, and in a few words its meaning can be expressed in these two propositions: (1) The Institute as a whole is never to be shown openly in external activities *without true need*; (2) This *need* arises when if the Institute did not show itself, this would detract from our own holiness or that of others - in short from the glory of God. The difficulty lies in deciding just when this necessity arises; and this decision is left to the insight of individual Superiors. In time we shall be able to draw up more precise rules over this; but for now it is fitting that each of us should try to absorb the *spirit of humility and prudence* proper to the Institute and try to act in accordance with it. One man will do this more perfectly, another less so - according to the gifts God gives to each. By taking thought and discussing the matter together we shall find ways of keeping the actions of the Institute hidden, even though this at first seemed impossible. This I urge on our Presbyters, who must have at heart this way of acting, trying to combine the actions of individuals with all the other good ends we hope to attain, for the glory of God.

Warm greetings to yourself and all our brethren.

Yours affectionately in Christ,

ROSMINI p.

135. To the Sister of Providence Matilde Stedile at Domodossola

Stresa, 12 April 1840

My dear daughter in Christ,

Serve the Lord in good heart, and do not think about the future. Even if, after fifteen months, you were to be moved away from the Central House in order to finish your noviciate (which lasts for three years), the Lord will be with you, have no doubts about it. If you show good will, God will not send you away from his house, and you will die happily in his holy place, even though you are not without the faults and imperfections which you must continue to try to rid yourself of as long as you live. Be constant, persevere, and you will win the victory - because your Spouse has overcome the world.

You did wrong to conceal from the Superior your indisposition: you must have complete confidence in her as in the tenderest of mothers; and I say the same of your Novice Mistress. So as a penance for this defect (which comes of a touch of self-love), for the next three days you are to make a cross on the ground with your tongue as soon as you get up, and apply the first three Holy Communions you receive to an intention I have in mind. May the Lord bless you and all your companions. Goodbye.

Your father in Christ,

A. ROSMINI p.

136. To Pietro Zencher in England

Stresa, 19 April 1840

. . . A word from the heart to you too, dear Pietro . . . Our poverty does not allow anyone to receive so much as a piece of thread as a gift without permission of the Superior; but within this general rule, the Superior may give a greater or lesser degree of freedom, according to his discretion. So turn to him - he is within easy reach - and hear him as if the Lord himself were speaking to you.

Continue to love and serve this good God of ours: love him in yourself, in your Superiors, in your brethren, in your neighbour, in all creatures. You already know that the noblest of creatures is our Blessed Lady; so you can understand how much you must love and praise God for what he has done in her. But I seem to be saying that you alone should honour her! This is not what I mean, for I too want to love her: I want all of us to do so - in the Institute and outside it, all on earth and in heaven, so that the whole universe may be filled with love, and that we may all be joined together in love, in the Father and in the Son - to whom be all honour and glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Yours,

ROSMINI

137. To Sister Marta, Sister of Providence, at Intragna

Stresa, 22 April 1840

Praise be to Jesus and to his Mother!

What is this I hear, my daughter - that you lack trust in God your Father? Is it possible that a Daughter of Providence should allow herself to be deceived by such an idea? Surely this can never be true. You are 'of Providence', and Providence is yours. And if the Providence of the Creator is yours, what do you fear? What anxieties can you have? Nothing will be lacking to you, in life or in death: everything will go well for your eternal salvation. o woman of little faith! You would not mistrust your own mother - and do you doubt God? Remember that a Sister of Providence ought to know God and keep her eyes fixed on him; and anyone who knows and contemplates God can never be afraid. Let those who do not know him be fearful. So abandon yourself into his arms, and think of nothing but serving him - joyfully, with courage and constancy.

I give you permission to make each Saturday many acts of hope and trust in your Creator and Spouse. But as for fasting, let your Superior be the judge in this matter. She may allow you to fast now and then. But for a Sister, one act of great trust in God is worth more than many a fast. Goodbye.

Your affectionate father in Christ,

A. ROSMINI p.

138. To Don Luigi Gentili⁵²

Stresa, feast of the finding of the Holy Cross, 1840

My dear brother in Christ,

1. I believe that the Lord will grant you abundant grace if you will, in poverty and simplicity of spirit, consider as words of his the advice I have previously given you in writing. You could make an extract from these letters of mine and keep it before your eyes, leaving aside what applies to circumstances that no longer exist.

2. To the counsels I have previously given you I now add here some others. If you receive them in the depth of your heart you will find in them the strength you need.

3. First, putting aside all self-love, unite yourself closely in a spirit of good will to the heart and mind of your Superior, Don G. B. Pagani. Respect him interiorly as the channel of the divine light and the will of God. Try to act always with his consent, conforming yourself to his mind. Let him know everything about yourself and your affairs, and the circumstances in which you find yourself; and consult him trustingly and loyally. Do not attempt to do good things on your own or in ways that displease him. Consider any such 'good' as a deceptive appearance of good - the results of which God will not bless. Anything outside Pagani's faculties (for instance if it is a matter of a new foundation), you are to write to me about, both directly and through Pagani.

4. So too, try to have an interior esteem for and a perfect union in charity with all your other brethren in England, and profit by their insights and suggestions if these come to your notice. Remember that we are brothers in charity.

5. Do not burden yourself overmuch with commitments which may exceed your strength or your knowledge. I am much afraid of the danger that you may fall into, whether through ill-considered zeal, or the sort of self-love which makes us believe that we are capable of what is really beyond us; or lastly because of the fervour and zeal of the people you live among. It is often easy to start things, but difficult to continue them or bring them to a conclusion. And so, especially in these matters, consult your Superior about everything - and also send me frank and unbiased reports.

6. These reports (as well as the letters you write to me) must be set out in an orderly fashion, briefly, and with all the facts. Every two months you are to

⁵² Don Luigi Gentili had gone to Italy in 1839 with other Fathers to take the Presbyter vows. In May 1840 he set out back to England (cf. E.C. 3855 and 4023). It was at this time that Rosmini sent him these instructions. They were not printed in E.C., but the original is kept in the archives at Stresa.

give your report to Pagani, and he will add his comments and pass everything on to me.

7. Every day ask God and his Blessed Mother for the virtue of prudence, so that you may judge without haste, speak with consideration, and act with caution. When you are talking, especially about controversial matters, make sure that you limit yourself to few but certain arguments, leaving aside any less weighty reasons. If you act like this, what you say will not only be short and restrained: it will have a convincing power that no one can withstand.

8. As soon as you reach England, pass these instructions on to Don Pagani, who will make a copy for his own guidance. He is urged especially to carry out what is laid down in No. 6.

Your father in Christ,

A. ROSMINI-SERBATI

Provost General of the Institute of Charity

139. To Baron Isaaco Eccaro at Innsbruck

Stresa, 4 May 1840

My dear Isaaco,

You did well to send me news of the happy outcome of your examinations, which I was glad to hear about. What pleased me even more than your success was to see that you praised God for this and rightly acknowledged your indebtedness and expressed your gratitude to him. This attitude of piety and justice will, I hope, be yours at all stages of your career, and in this way you will draw real benefit from your studies, which the Lord will bless. Their fortunate outcome, far from leading you to be vain, will only make you more humble and submissive to the God from whom come all gifts and all enlightenment. This is the way of wisdom.

I hope to see you back home next autumn: we can then talk at length together. Meanwhile, thank your mother for her greetings, and keep me in your prayers. Goodbye.

Yours affectionately,

ROSMINI p.

140. To Mr Ambrose Phillips in England

Stresa, 5 May 1840

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

Our dear *Gentili* is at last with you. He would have come sooner, had not his state of health, and the mortal illness of the brother who was to have accompanied him kept him here up to now. Receive him with your usual love, the love with which I send him to you. May he be for England a new St Augustine: the Lord's arm is not shortened, and his mercies are infinite. If we pray we shall receive: we want only *God's will* and his glory.

I entrust to your care also *Gentili's* health, which is not robust. In this connection, and also to proceed with due prudence, it would seem to me necessary not to burden him with too many commitments at the start, but to take things by degrees, restraining his zeal.

I am sending you by *Gentili* your *letter of ascription to the Institute* as a seal on the love which unites us. It may be *God's will* that this society of ours, of the Ascribed Members, should produce great good in England. I have a presentiment of this: ascribed membership seems to me well adapted to the needs of your country. I even believe that this membership may spread from England to other countries, bringing together into closest union the more devoted followers of Christ scattered in various parts of the world. For our badge, the badge given us by our *Master*, is *universal charity*.

Give my greetings to your excellent wife. Don Luigi will give you further news about us. Pray for and continue to love

Your affectionate friend in Christ,

A. R.

141. To Don G. B. Pagani at Prior Park

Stresa, 5 May 1840

. . . I thank God over the retreat you have made and the light you gained from it. God will I hope give you the grace to carry out perseveringly the resolutions you have made.

In reply to your question: the words *habeat zelum ad Ecclesiae tantum incrementum ordinatum* [let his zeal be directed solely to the increase of the Church] have the meaning you give to them, and in addition they express the need that our zeal for the progress of the Institute must be subordinated to and conditional on the good of the Church; so that should God in his inscrutable designs and unfathomable wisdom judge that the Institute or its progress were no longer useful for the *total good* of the body of his Church, then we should submit to his judgement and no longer wish for it to survive. So our zeal must be conditional, not absolute, without any right to decide what may or may not be useful for the Church as a whole. This is a judgement beyond our capabilities and belongs solely to God and the Church itself.

Coming now to our dear Don Luigi [*Gentili*]: since there cannot be two Superiors in England, Don Luigi will be subject to you. Before he sets out on his mission he will (as he wishes) make a retreat at Prior Park under your direction: and during it you will tell him candidly about all the defects you have noticed in him -faults that he is anxious, with God's help, to overcome, knowing them to be his chief spiritual enemies. Give him what instructions you deem necessary and decide how you will communicate with one another. This should happen as often as possible, and should be marked on both sides by the greatest spiritual union, together with mutual respect and trust.

I send fondest greetings and my blessing to all of you, in the love of our Lord, to whom be praise and thanksgiving for all things, for ever and ever.

Yours in Christ,

A. R.

142. To Don Luigi Gentili at Domodossola⁵³

Stresa, 8 May 1840

... We can never grow tired, my dear Luigi, of repeating that ejaculatory prayer you have chosen: it contains in itself the whole profession of our life. The justice it speaks of, perfect righteousness (since it is the righteousness of God), is our good, our light, our food, our life, such that every time we acquire the slightest increase in it, our hunger for it increases a thousand fold. For it is an inexhaustible joy which makes us happy but does not satiate us; it shows itself to be infinitely precious to our soul, yet it is still totally hidden from us, far from our gaze. Who can lead us to it? Who can bring it to us? Our own power is non-existent; our own will is blind. But we can be led to his righteousness by the infinite God who possesses it completely and essentially, and who can make it available to us. Let us then pray with even greater earnestness and desire: 'Lord, lead me in the way of your righteousness'. Oh, what happiness, what great hope, is contained in this short prayer!

Yours in the heart of Christ,

ROSMINI p.

⁵³ Gentili left Stresa on 5 May and remained for a few days at Monte Calvario before setting out for England. (cf. *La Vita di L. Gentili* by G. B. Pagani, p.236).

143. To Don Bernardo Mazzi in Milan⁵⁴

Stresa, 10 May 1840

My dear brother in our Lord Jesus Christ,

I am glad to hear that your bodily health is good. Try also to keep your spiritual health at a high and joyful level too. You already know that when we are content in tranquillity this helps wonderfully both our soul and our body. To attain this it is helpful to cultivate simplicity, often admitting ourselves to be wrong, and when we feel a repugnance for anything, overcoming ourselves day by day in the various small incidents we experience in life. Do not be distressed when you find yourself dependent on others and in need of their help; for only in this way can you practise the poverty and humility of our Lord. If you could repay others for what they do for you, you would no longer be totally poor. For that matter, you *can* repay them: a single 'Hail, Mary' or 'Memorare', the smallest invocation you say for them - these are worth more than any earthly goods that they could give you.

For the rest, I am glad that you have a low opinion of yourself; but never on any account entertain the thought that you are unable to gain merit in the sight of God. This would be a suggestion of the devil to deceive you into a false kind of humility. Be happy rather because you *can* merit through Christ, whose priest you are, of whom you are a member; and because you do in effect gain merit every day through all the things, however seemingly unimportant, you do or suffer for love of him. Rejoice, then, that he merits in you; and do not deprive your soul of this consoling thought, which is entirely in conformity with the truth and with the trust we ought to have in our beloved God.

Dear Don Luigi has left for England, full of courage; and God, for whose sake he goes so far away, will be at his side. Give my greetings to our dear Count and to Polidori, and continue to love me in the Lord, in whom I remain

Yours,

ROSMINI p.

⁵⁴ Don Giacomo Mazzi was in Milan on account of illness. He was born in Lugagno (Verona), and before entering the Institute he had been secretary to Cardinal Odescalchi. He made the Spiritual Coadjutor vows at Calvario on 25 March 1839; but at the end of December 1849 or early in January 1850 he left the Institute. Later, in 1872, he was accepted back into it as an External Coadjutor.

144. To Professor Challamel, a Canon in Chambéry

Stresa, 16 May 1840

Dear Reverend Professor,

[Rosmini first speaks of a disastrous fire which had afflicted the family of the Professor. He then goes on:] Truly, the designs of *God* are inscrutable. He will have seen that this calamity was to the advantage of his Kingdom, and for this reason alone he permitted it to happen. For all that he does and allows and arranges is ordered to the increase of that Kingdom: every time we say *Thy Kingdom come* we implicitly make an act of total resignation to everything: we ask for all the events, even those that seem harmful, which in his lofty wisdom *God* knows to be necessary to bring about the coming and the triumph of his Kingdom in men's souls. It may be that the fire, while it destroyed temporal things, at the same time destroyed and consumed sin in people's souls! Many people have been tested by tribulation and come through it to their profit. The wicked have been afflicted and given a warning; the imperfect have been purified; and just souls, for whom everything works to their advantage, have been made more holy. Such are the ways of divine Providence, for whom this life and its events are no more than means. Apart from anything else, so many acts of charity that are now done everywhere for the sake of those who have been struck by disaster are already a treasure of much greater worth from a spiritual point of view than what was destroyed in the fire.

My dear Professor, you certainly are in no need of these words of consolation; but it is dear to my heart to express them in sentiments that I am sure you fully share.

With kind regards from Madam Bolongaro and myself, and my respectful affection in the Lord,

Your most humble and grateful servant and friend,

A. ROSMINI p.

145. To Don Giacomo Molinari at San Michele

Stresa, 3 June 1840

My dear brother in Christ,

I urgently recommend you to foster the spiritual perfection of all those in your care: try to be all things to all men. This will be a great work of charity - the genuine charity which we are called upon to show. This, too, is the way to overcome the temptations of the enemy; practise charity, the KINGLY charity of Christ, and all will be well. But such charity calls for much *patience* and *self-denial*, together with respect and regard for those we wish to help, as well as constant, careful, thoughtful concern.

For the rest, read the part of the *Treatise on Conscience* which shows how we must console those who in their doubts yet greatly and constantly desire to love and serve God. Goodbye.

[no signature]

146. To Don Luigi Gentili in England

Stresa, 3 June 1840

My dear brother in Christ,

We have all thanked God and his dear Mother from our hearts over your journey, which was both speedier and smoother than we had expected. These things give us even greater reasons to bind ourselves to God and be ever more faithful servants in love. We also rejoiced in your diligence in writing to us at every stage of your journey, as we had asked. We counted the days, always looking forward anxiously to the arrival of your letters, and receiving them with joy. But what pleases me most of all is to know of the full and sincere love which unites you with Don Giambattista [Pagani]. Such indefatigable charity (which calls for humility) is the special mark of the disciples of our beloved Master, and so of our Institute, which aims to be nothing else but a union of such disciples. Would that we were worthy of this name, and were recognized as such by the angels! Let us make this our great desire. We must pray for this, and make it come true, since it is what we long for.

Give my love and greetings in the Lord to our dear brother, Mr Phillips, and my respects to his wife. I shall be happy to hear how things go, and especially to know the result of your retreat. I am sure that in it you remembered before God your poor and wretched

R. p.

147. To Don Giuseppe Roberto Setti at Domodossola

Stresa, 11 June 1840

My dear brother in the Lord,

I should like to make you a present of some advice which will be useful for you. I have more than once noticed a fault in you: a great urge to justify yourself in everything, to vindicate yourself whenever you are blamed - or even when you are not, but are afraid that people may form a poor estimate of your prudence.

This defect shows itself in what you say, and in almost all your letters there is some sign of it. What you wrote to Gilardi on 9 June shows perhaps most of all your careful and quite unnecessary anxiety to appear justified in everything; you make a great show of acting in line with the Rules, even in the smallest details.

I hope your response to this advice of mine will not be yet another carefully thought out justification of your behaviour over this matter of self-vindication. But I realize that you will have to keep a careful watch over yourself if you are to avoid falling into the very fault I am warning you about, while at the same time protesting strongly how anxious you are to improve. These are things that, unless others tell us about them, we find it hard to discern in ourselves, because we do not see our own words and excuses as they appear to other people. So we have to draw profit from advice, accepting whatever part of it can help us; and if some of it does not apply to our case, let it pass, and no harm will be done.

There is often associated with this small fault of yours another one (if it does not stand on its own) over which you should examine yourself: and that is a habit of becoming querulous, or stubborn, or too insistent, during arguments. These are defects which could lessen precious charity if they were found in a Superior, and could therefore sap the trust of the brethren in him. Learn then to become a model of serene gentleness in arguments and disputes. These, if they are conducted in a scholarly way, are very useful: but it is necessary to take much care to bring to such discussions a great deal of virtue: self-distrust, tolerance, patience and deference to the opinions of others, showing respect for all those taking part, giving them time to speak, and never trying to force them to accept our own views (which should be put forward as possible rather than absolutely certain).

To repay me for the charity of this letter to you, say a rosary for

Your poor but most affectionate brother,

ROSMINI p.

PS I urge you to make sure that every year each of our brethren makes his retreat. It is a good idea to arrange a time for this with each one early on in the year.

148. To the Sister of Providence Teresa Alvazzi at Locarno

Stresa, 29 June 1840

My dear daughter in Christ,

As you know, the Rules of the Institute of Providence require that the spiritual director and the confessor should be different persons. The confessor should not be approached except in the confessional over matters of conscience. The Sisters of Providence should confess their sins frankly, and should not need to have recourse to the confessional too often or remain there very long. In other matters the Superiors should act on their own, like capable women; and when necessary refer to the director or the Superior General. It may be that these are the instructions the Mother Visitor has given you; but so that there may not be any kind of doubt, send me her letter. When I have read it I will tell you exactly what is prescribed by the nature of the Institute of Providence and its Rules, and I will inform your Father Confessor fully about the matter.

Tell Sister Veronica, if you think it wise, that I hope that she, who held the position of Superior for a while, will set the others an example of humility and obedience - the virtues in which she should be foremost. All Sisters of Providence should be very glad when they are released from office, and thank the Lord for this. Every religious should find her pleasure in humbling herself from her heart, in both words and deeds, below all her companions, after the example of the one who said 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord.' It would be a dreadful thing if sentiments other than these were to enter the heart of a Sister. When such thoughts come into our minds we must fight against them, seeing them as terrible temptations of the evil one.

Turn to God and ask him to give you the necessary virtues of charity and prudence; and send me at once the letter of the Mother Visitor so that we may settle everything satisfactorily. Have no doubts, but in your letter tell me about your thoughts and reflections, so that I may be helped to establish fixed and suitable rules for the house - which is very dear to my heart. Get your Sisters to offer up a Holy Communion for me.

Your father in Christ,

ROSMINI p.

149. To the Sister of Providence Costanza Samonini at Domodossola

Stresa, 28 June 1840 (Note: This date is out of order)

My dear daughter in Christ,

I was pleased to get your letter, in which you give me news of yourself. My main advice to you is that you should keep always before your eyes the life of Jesus Christ your Spouse, so as to imitate him and follow his heavenly teachings. And among these, two of the things he urges are *abandonment of yourself to divine Providence* and *love of your neighbour*. He said that his disciples would be known by the love they had for one another. This is true perfection, the highest religious perfection that can be conceived; and it is to this that you are called in the Institute of Providence. Make sure that you have the right idea about this, and do not believe that religious perfection consists in enclosure or a certain regularity in prayer, or things of this kind. No, my daughter, genuine perfection does not consist in these things, though they can be good and useful in acquiring perfection, if God grants them to us. So choose for your Master in the way of perfection Jesus Christ alone. Notice that neither he nor his apostles, though they were examples of the greatest perfection, lived an enclosed life, or followed any fixed Rule. Rather they went wherever they were called by *divine Providence* and *the love of their neighbour*.

God will help you wherever you go out of love for him and in order to do good to the souls he has redeemed. What you have to do now is to make great efforts to become perfect in your present state, the state in which it is certain the Lord has placed you; and drive away every other thought which could harm your progress; and grow in love for your Institute, which is entirely devoted to Providence and to love. You will have temptations, and they may even be strong; but have no fear. God will be with you if on your part you do not let yourself be distracted by the mistaken ideas with which the devil customarily troubles souls under the appearance of good. Offer a Holy Communion for me, and whenever you need advice, do write to me without hesitation. Goodbye.

With my blessing,

A. ROSMINI p.

150. To Don Luigi Gentili at Grace Dieu

Stresa, 3 July 1840

My dear brother and companion in the service of the Lord,

I was greatly consoled to hear from your letter about the good resolutions you made in your retreat, and particularly some that I regard as indispensable. In order to avoid distractions (which is the first on your list), it is necessary to make sure that you keep your conversations short - I have noticed many times that you go on at too great length. Speaking more briefly and treating of things more concisely is particularly necessary where women are concerned, no matter what kind of women they may be.

Your second resolution, aimed at sincere and entire obedience, would in itself be enough to make you holy if (as I hope) God gives you the grace to carry it out. Do battle against the really diabolical suggestion that it is good that Superiors should not know certain things, and that if you act independently of them you can do greater good. On the contrary, you should have a rooted belief of heart and mind in the maxim: 'Nothing is good unless my Superiors approve of it: anything I do in an underhand way, keeping it hidden from them, is wrong.' It is true that some schemes may begin with every appearance of being good; but for the love of God, do not trust in this: they will come to a bad end if they are not truly done in a sincere and properly dependent way, if they are not the actions of one who is 'poor in spirit', rather than someone who puffs himself up with the delusion of being wise. I hope that you will always keep this holy resolution before your eyes, and that this will give you an example of the way a member of the Institute of Charity should act when on his own.

Equally important is your resolution to have a love of *holy poverty*. Always have recourse to Christ naked on the cross and to his imitator St Francis, who received so much enlightenment from the Crucified One that he too embraced holy poverty. In this matter you need certain rules, which could also serve for others; but I shall not give them to you at once because I want to think about them. If you have any suggestions that might help me to put together such rules (provided that what you say is aimed at tightening up rather than relaxing the poverty which is so important in our Institute) I shall be pleased if you will send them to me. Meanwhile, make a point of acting like a poor man as far as possible, *depending on* your immediate Superior, Don Pagani (who must be for you like the angel of the Lord) and avoiding entirely *acts of ownership*.

I have taken note of the other things you said, and I expect soon to receive a report on the state of your mission (not in the form of a letter), *well ordered and thoroughly considered*, but simple and not embellished with eloquence. I should also like to know whether Mr Phillips' impatience to have you there was due to some impending danger or to something else.

Give my greetings in the Lord to our dear Phillips. Continue to love me, and pray for me. I am from my heart

Your affectionate father in Christ,

ROSMINI p.

151. To Maria Righini at Domodossola

20 July 1840

My daughter,

I can do no less than approve of your Superior's advice that you should go home, in obedience to your father's wish. The Lord will be with you there too; and if you are faithful to him he will guard you from the dangers of the world, and you will afterwards return to serve him in his house as his bride, among his spouses, as you long to do. You will be near him to serve him, and you will unite yourself with him for ever and ever. But I do urge you to be faithful! He first invited you, for it was he who inspired in your heart the call to be his spouse, the vocation you tell me about. So you must keep ever alive in you the voice of his call. If deep in your heart you always hear his voice, try to please him in every slightest act, affection and thought, he will grant you precious gifts of joy. Trust him, then, and more than that, abandon yourself always to him. Goodbye.

A. ROSMINI p.

152. To Don Alessio Martin at San Michele

Stresa, 20 July 1840

My dear brother in Christ,

You ask my permission to use part of the income from your inheritance on various things; and at the same time you continue to disobey (out of false human prudence) the express command of your Superior. In so doing you offend (with an uneasy conscience) the sacred vows you have made. I can only lament over the scandal this behaviour of yours gives to the whole Institute, and I fervently ask God to be merciful to you, enlighten you, and give you the generosity of heart which is absolutely necessary to your holy vocation.

In another of your letters you wrote, if I remember aright, that you love the *apostolic life*. But how did the apostles begin their life as such? *Behold, we have left everything and followed you*. And are you, who may well be near the end of your life, unable to leave behind the wretched things of this world? Are you instead ready to violate your sacred vows and lose your soul for ever? For my part I want to protest before God's judgement-seat, *I am innocent of this man's blood!* I have warned you: I warn you again, as is my duty, that when you disobey an express command you commit a *mortal sin*. Whatever sophism you may invent to justify yourself, you cannot hide the truth from yourself when death comes - and it may surprise you at any moment, for the Lord says: *I shall come like a thief in the night*. Nor can you hide the truth from God your Judge, to whom you have bound yourself by the most solemn vows. There is no necessity for you to be in Savoy, or in Italy; but it is necessary for you to go to heaven. God does not command you to speak French or Italian (this is a matter of indifference), but he does command you to be true to your word: *pay your vows to the Lord*. So do not ask me as your Superior for more permissions: but first *obey what I have commanded you in the name of the Lord*, and for your own good. If you take courage and break the miserable bonds which tie you to this earth, I will most readily embrace you. I do not want anything of yours in all this: it is you yourself that I seek. Yes, I am *searching for what has been lost*. So take courage: give me this consolation.

Your father in Christ,

A. ROSMINI p.

153. To Don Giuseppe Gagliardi, Archpriest of Agrano

Stresa, 29 August 1840

Dear and Very Reverend Sir,

I was pleased to receive your letter of 25 August. I am sure that if you persevere in prayer to the Lord and make sincere acts of fervent desire to be all his, to sacrifice yourself to his will *in truth and justice*, the most holy will of God will appear clearly to you, as the sun dissipates the clouds. Resolution and perseverance are needed in all this. Only today I received a copy of a letter of St Peter of Alcantara for me to read, and I consider this as the working of Providence, as if it had been sent to me for your benefit. So I will send it to you just as it is. Take counsel with the author of that letter, and then decide without hesitation.

I can give you no advice over the Institute: I can only give you the information you ask for. So I advise you and urge you to give yourself to the Lord as perfectly as possible, and to aim only at the great goal of cultivating in yourself the greatest possible holiness, the greatest justice, the greatest charity. What the Institute regards as the sign of a vocation is solely *'the desire and the resolve to seek for the greatest possible holiness, with every other thought put aside; and therefore an entire sacrifice of self, with entire indifference to any place, grade or office.'* The Institute is ready to receive all who come to it with such a disposition, which (as I said) it sees as the one certain sign of a vocation.

Pray also for me; and let me know what the Lord may be pleased to make known to you. Meanwhile I embrace you in the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Your most affectionate servant,

A. ROSMINI-SERBATI p.

154. To the Sister of Providence Teresa Alvazzi at Locarno

Stresa, 31 August 1840

My dear daughter in the Lord,

It will be impossible for me to see you before I leave for the Tyrol, which may be any day now. But you can probably tell me all that you want to say either when I return (which will be in mid-October) or by letter.

I must make it clear that you should have no difficulty in speaking about even the most confidential and private matters to the Director, Don Rusca; and anything to do with the Sisters you can always say frankly to the Superior at the Central House in Domodossola. This would be no sort of offence against charity - indeed it *would* rather be such an offence if you concealed from Superiors anything to do with the Institute; for if you did this they would not be able to manage matters for the glory of God and the sanctification of the Sisters themselves. So have no uneasiness on this score. The Superiors are fathers, and fathers need to know about the behaviour of their children. So you can consult senior members of the Institute such as the Superior at Domodossola, for this too is entirely consistent with charity.

Please tell Sister Veronica that if there is anything she wants to say to me she should write to me or tell it to the Director. I shall then see her on my return.

Be of good heart and place all your trust in God, from whom I ask every blessing for you. In haste,

A. ROSMINI p.

155. To Margarita Santon at Domodossola

Stresa, 1 September 1840

. . . I was displeased to hear that you had scarcely arrived there when you showed yourself discontented with your holy vocation. It does not surprise me that being far away from the people you know, and the general aspect of a religious house, have combined to upset you greatly: this is a trick of the devil, and is quite a common occurrence.

In writing to you now it is not my intention to try to hold you against your will. Only those who want to sacrifice themselves wholly for the love of *God* belong in religious houses. So if you do not wish to make this entire sacrifice of your natural inclinations, by all means return home. But you need first to calm down, so that it may not seem that you have decided lightly, and that you do not lose credit even among people outside, given that you have made such a long journey, and on your very first day after entering religious life, without even giving it a try, have (on the strength of a mere fantasy) hastily decided to leave, as if from a hell. People as inconstant as this cannot possibly please *God*, or even the world.

Against this, the call of *God* is of such infinite value that it would be quite wrong to disdain it or to renounce it on a mere whim. Rather it is a treasure that we have to gain through our merits, and through *sufferings borne for love of God*. We have to know how to defend ourselves against the assaults of the enemy of souls - assaults which are all the more furious when he is displeased at the sight of a soul wishing to consecrate herself to the service of *God*. So you must become calmer in mind, look quietly at the situation in the light of *God's* grace, and then consider what at the moment of death you would wish to have done.

In the meantime I will fully inform Don Angeli about everything. If you would like to send a letter to him, let me have it and I will take it to him myself, since I shall be going any day now to Rovereto. Then, as regards your return, we will do whatever Don Angeli deems best. Pray fervently to *God* and to our Blessed Lady so that they may help you over such an important decision, and so that you may not fall into the snares of the infernal enemy. May the Lord bless you.

Yours in Christ,

A. ROSMINI p.

156. To Antonio Carli⁵⁵ at Domodossola

Stresa, 6 September 1840

My dear brother and son in the Lord,

I am glad to hear that you are resolved to become holy. Always remember that holiness implies a liking to be contradicted and humbled, whether deservedly or not; a wish to be obedient, a willingness to wait patiently, an indifference too in regard to the wishes of Superiors, denying our own will, recognition of the benefits we receive, deep gratitude, an awareness of our own unworthiness, respect for others, especially God's ministers, a sincere charity, tranquillity of mind, resignation, gentleness, a wish to do good to everyone, and the habit of hard work.

I am just about to leave here and cannot write further - but this is enough.
Pray for

Your affectionate father in Christ,

A. R. p.

⁵⁵ This good laybrother, who had come a few years earlier from the Trentino, was chosen by Rosmini as his assistant. Brother Carli held this position right up to Rosmini's death, taking loving care of him with all sorts of service, and being at his side with the affection of a son in the last painful illness.

157. To Don Giuseppe Gagliardi, Archpriest of Agrano

Stresa, 8 November 1840

Very Reverend Sir, my brother and companion already in the service of God,

If God in his goodness speaks to your heart and tells you to consecrate yourself entirely to him in the Institute of Charity, I advise you to bring this about as soon as possible. *The grace of the Holy Spirit brooks no delay.* The more promptly the creature responds to the call of his Creator, the more abundant are the graces and consolations he receives; and the less a man called to religion lingers in the world, the less time the enemy has to wage war against him. Moreover, even if you were to give up your parish at once, some months would have to pass before all the arrangements could be made. Hence for this reason too I would think you should not delay putting things in hand.

It seems to me that the difficulties that hinder your way forward at present are such that, with God's help, they can be overcome. Family difficulties, as you know well, are to be faced according to the words of Christ which St Matthew gives us: 'Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth: I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and one's foes will be members of one's own household.' Parish difficulties can be overcome by reflecting, first, that the greater good does not yield to the lesser; and that when you enter a religious institute, in which those who join it offer themselves to God without any limit or restriction, so that God, if he so wills, can use them in whatever is the greatest work of charity, even if it costs them their lives, - I say that by entering such an institute one does more for souls and for the Church simply by this general offering than one could do by remaining outside, even given all the particular good deeds one might perform in the limited sphere of the parish.

In the second place, by entering the Institute you could do good to your parish of Agrano. For instance, the mission you consider so necessary could very well be given by members of the Institute.

Thirdly, one must presume that the priest who succeeds you will do what you would have wished to do, such as the work of sorting the archives and so on. It will help you if you trust that Providence, to whom you commend the souls of your flock, will send them a suitable man - all the more so if you had intended putting your hand to certain works or improvements, or should leave them half done, or delay indefinitely the fulfilment of your vocation. It is a wise rule not to begin things that will soon have to be abandoned; it is better that your successor should be left to initiate, according to his own judgement, things that he will henceforth have to maintain and develop.

The Institute is consecrated to universal charity, and so the highest work it can achieve is the pastoral care of souls. But this work is so great an undertaking in my view, so difficult, so fraught with danger, and above all so divine, that the Institute does not accept parishes without very great consideration and preparation; and this preparation has not yet been made. Besides this, the Institute in its works of charity follows the leading of divine Providence. It does not pick and choose: it does what God puts in its hands and *perseveres* in this. Nor does it take on other works unless it has subjects over and above those who can carry on the works to which it is already committed. It must persevere with these on and try to bring them to perfection. At present the entire Institute is engaged in this improvement of works previously accepted. When the divine mercy is pleased to send it more men it will do more. So if for your part you want to bring forward this time, then pray fervently and come.

I take the liberty of embracing you warmly in the Lord, while I remain, in the Sacred Heart

Your most humble and affectionate servant and brother,

A. ROSMINI

Provost General of the Institute of Charity

158. To Monsignor Baron G. B. Trentini in Trent⁵⁶

Stresa, 15 November 1840

Very Reverend Monsignor,

Thank you for telling me about the favourable symptoms: may the Lord make the barometer rise to 'fine'! He in whom we have put all our hopes can easily bring this about, since 'the winds and the sea obey him.' But we must never cease to pray; and this is one of the ways, my dear Monsignor, in which you can do much to help our common cause - the glory of God.

I did not know that Görres had written the two articles you mention⁵⁷. But is this something I shall feel vainglory about? Yes, if I put my trust in myself. But unless I am mistaken, it seems to me that in the past the Lord has given me enough light to know the emptiness of all human glory; and that, far from taking pleasure in praise, it in fact genuinely displeases me, distresses me, is a sort of cross. But I cannot speak for the future; and your loving counsels and advice are always opportune and precious, as are all signs of true friendship. So do not cease to do me the charity of a *memento*.

I was much consoled to hear what is happening over the priest Stefano Bellesini, and I should like to see the process that will be begun (I gather) in all the places where this holy man lived go ahead with all the zeal that is necessary over a matter that so much concerns the glory of God⁵⁸. But I should not be surprised if (as you suggest) the devil were to use every possible means of hindering something that so greatly saddens him - the glory on earth of the faithful servants of the Lord (since he cannot prevent it in heaven.) But in any case the enemy of all good will do no more than God permits.

As for the encouragement you give me, I can assure you, my dear Monsignor, that I have never felt discouragement and that what I have done was done in all tranquillity, in the conviction that I was following the divine will. I still have the same affection for Trent that I felt in 1830, when Mgr Luschin invited me to make a foundation of the Institute there; and I went to Trent in 1831 with exactly the same sentiments that I felt in 1835, when I left. In each case I was equally content to do *the will of God*. This alone is what I seek, and what I shall seek as long as I live. It is, I hope, what will constitute my good in all eternity. Men mean nothing to me. I love them all; I want their good; I greatly esteem the virtue I see in them; but neither their vices nor the wrongs they do me cause any change in my attitude towards them. Pray then, and have no

⁵⁶ See note to Letter 84.

⁵⁷ For praise of Rosmini by Görres see *Vita di A. Rosmini*, vol.II, pp.5354.

⁵⁸ Fr Stefano Bellesini, O.S.A., was born in Trent in 1774, died in Gennezano on 2 February 1840, and was canonized by Pope Pius X.

doubts. If it should please God in his goodness to recall the Institute to Trent (something that does not look likely to happen in the near future), I should return there with the same intention of doing good and with the same confidence as before. At the most I should be more cautious over putting myself in the hands of those whom I once trusted implicitly, abandoning myself with the trustfulness of a sleeping child. But even this simplicity of mine was permitted by God for his own lofty ends, and I am glad that it was so. I bless him daily for this as for all his other mercies.

Please convey my greetings to our friends in the Lord. With deep respect and affection I remain in the Sacred Heart of Jesus

Your most humble and obedient servant and friend,

A. ROSMINI p.

159. To Don Giuseppe Gagliardi, parish priest of Agrano

Stresa, 21 November 1840

My dear brother in the Lord,

Have no doubts: the Lord will provide. In the meantime, I have thought about asking advice myself from Monsignor the Vicar without mentioning your name. Perhaps he will be prepared to give you some simple benefice for the time being, or even dispense you altogether if the Institute were to stand security for you. At the worst I will cover the debt myself. For now, until I receive a reply (which I will pass on to you at once), all you have to do is to *remain in the love-nest, in the cleft of the rock (which is Christ)*, waiting, praying, and offering sacrifices. Be prepared for whatever God wills, to do what he wills. Let this be your only consideration, and let all your trust and affection be centred here.

I hope you have read, and will read again, with great attention, the *Maxims* and the two *Memorials*. You would do well to take these, one after the other, as the material of your daily meditations. Also, entrust the parish into the hands of the Lord. He is the Good Shepherd: he will provide, either through the Institute or in some other way; but everything in his own good time. And let us remember that even when it is a matter of holy works, even when it comes to establishing the Kingdom of God, *it is not for you to know the times or the periods that the Father has set by his own authority*. So let us leave to our Father this knowledge, and not try to usurp his place. This is one of the most precious maxims of the Institute to which God is calling you. You will find it more and more acceptable the more you dwell on it. It is strong meat, and at first may taste bitter; but in the end its delicious, unspeakably sweet savour will emerge.

My fondest regards in the Lord, while I have the honour to remain,

Yours most humbly and affectionately,

ROSMINI p.

160. To Don Giacomo Molinari at San Michele

Stresa, 22 November 1840

My dear brother in Christ,

For the material of our habit, *lastino*⁵⁹ has not as yet been prescribed, but in general any lightweight material will do, as long as it is not woollen. And since this is the current custom, it is well not to change it; for as you know, whenever rules are changed, order and uniformity are apt to suffer quite considerably. So look into the matter and choose from the strongest and most economical materials, as long as they are not woollen; and if you find something suitable, write to Calvario, so that the brethren there can see whether they should use it instead of lastino. As for the reason you give for your view that lastino is a material used by people who are better off, I would not agree with this idea if lastino is really economical (over which I have my doubts), first because I want our poverty to be a matter of reality rather than simply of appearance; and second, because according to the spirit of our Institute we must be religious as far as our *interior* life is concerned, but *externally* conform to the usage of the secular clergy.

I recommend all your subjects to your charity as strongly as I can. You already know that among us the greatest duty of a Superior is that of bringing about the holiness of those in his charge. In this connection I urge you to meditate well on and have always before your eyes nos. 9-14 of the *Rules of Superiors* and chapter IV of the *Rules for Rectors*. I know how great a task it is to govern well the spiritual lives of the lay brothers; but still it is necessary to put up with the labour generously and with a great heart. They are the sheep of our flock: they are souls assigned to us so that we may lead them forward along the path of perfection, even if we have to put them on our shoulders and carry their whole weight. It is all too easy for a Superior who has not entirely overcome self-love to cast off this burden in order to give himself to occupations that are more pleasant and more conspicuous in people's eyes. But let us not be deceived. I should like to have a good report, especially about Cesana and Huber, so that I may promote them to a higher grade.

But the greatest thorn in my side is N. N. I beg you most earnestly to use every effort to rouse him and put new life into him. Do not hesitate to confront him with the tremendous judgements of God, and to make his ears ring with *pay your vows to the Most High*. Tell him too that things cannot go on like this; that I cannot keep silent; that if I wait it is solely because I see him as on the edge of a precipice, and I would not wish to give him a push that might make him fall; that death may be nearer to him than he thinks. In short, do not spare any zealous effort. You are his Superior, and it is precisely to superiors that St

⁵⁹ *lastino* is a sturdy cotton or worsted cloth.

Paul applies these words of Proverbs (chapter VI, 1-5) *My child, you have given your pledge to your neighbour; if you have bound yourself to another you are snared by the utterance of your lips, caught by the words of your mouth. So do this, my child, and save yourself.. for you have come into your neighbour's power: go, hurry, and plead with your neighbour. Give your eyes no sleep and your eyelids no slumber; save yourself like a gazelle from the hunter, like a bird from the hand of the fowler.* I beg you, meditate on these words and apply them to yourself. Meanwhile I will pray for that house and especially for that particular need. I fear too that you are not giving the other priests and the deacon enough to do. I wish you could find a way of setting them to work, even if it means sending them out of the house, or taking them with you, if the opportunity occurs. Be careful not to forget about them, leave them behind, or be negligent over their good. When they are in the house let them use their time to the best possible advantage for their spiritual and intellectual benefit as a preparation for their pastoral work later. If they are not able to do a great deal, let us be content with little; but let them learn and produce all they can. The good farmer is one who can make his land yield the biggest crop possible; the good Superior is one who can make his subjects produce the most spiritual fruit.

I am glad to hear of the success of the retreat. Praise be to God, to our Lady and to St Michael. I hope you meet your consultors regularly, as is prescribed. From now on you are to send me a formal *report* every three months, so that I may fully know the state of the house, its finances, and how the rules are observed.

If I had space and time I should like to console you with the really edifying news of our dear saints in England; but I must be brief. My fondest regards and my blessing to all of you in our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom I remain,

ROSMINI p.

161. To Sister Maria Gioseffa Seydoux in Arona

Stresa, 6 December 1840

My dear daughter in Christ,

You wrote to me on 5 December asking me for consolation and help, and I am anxious to give you these things in my reply. May the Lord add his grace to these words of mine! We have to bear in mind, my dear daughter, that we were created by the Lord to practise the virtues he has taught us by his words and his example. He has called us to a religious institute; and in it we are consecrated to him in order to practise the virtues our Lord Jesus Christ taught us: this is our sublime and excellent purpose. He has given us the light of intelligence so that we may understand the beauty of such a vocation; he has moved our hearts to embrace it with all the love we are capable of. So say to yourself: 'The Lord has made me his own for ever; he has given me a ring as his bride so that I may love him, listen to him, and become like him through practising the virtues that are so dear to him.' When you have spent some time dwelling on this thought, and your soul has rejoiced in the Lord and thanked him for the great things he has done for his handmaid, go on to reason with yourself like this: 'So I must practise all the virtues; but how can I do this unless my good Lord, who sees my needs and from whom my strength comes, gives me the opportunity - or rather if I should refuse the opportunities he gives me from day to day? But no, I want to welcome these opportunities: I want to accept them with all my heart, be grateful to my Spouse for them. He is my guide along the path of this life, leading me to heaven, where I shall be with him for ever.'

After you have made these very suitable reflections, consider further that the opportunities of practising the virtues the Lord so esteems are especially the times when we meet with difficulties, such as the boredom or feelings of repugnance which often go with the duties of our state. So when you experience the tediousness and problems of teaching in school, say at once to yourself: 'Courage, Maria Gioseffa! This is what your Lord wants of you; this is your Spouse's will: what are you afraid of? Why are you upset:;> Have you forgotten that *he has promised to help you?* And that he is standing near you, hidden from view, and looking to see what you are resolved to do for his sake?' If you — say things like this to yourself *firmly and with determination*, you will be greatly encouraged, you will have greater strength - especially if in addition you pray to the Lord and to the Blessed Virgin his Mother for their help.

As for teaching Christian doctrine in church, do not arrange beforehand to do a lot; but be humbly content to do just a little and to do it quite simply (giving no thought to what the Canon did before you), and attending strictly to what is in the catechism. If you have time, prepare your lessons making use of Borigliani,

thinking over what he says and praying over it. Then go ahead in all simplicity, with great trust in God.

As regards the fear you feel when you find yourself on public show, remember that Sisters of Providence have to overcome this, because it is part of their ministry. Just think of yourself as there not as Gioseffa Seydoux but as *Sister*, and then your human fears and timidity will vanish. Fortitude and courage are necessary virtues in your holy Institute, and God will certainly give them to you. As for what you call your lack of knowledge: you must realize that knowledge does not come all at once but stage by stage; and so you need to have patience, making sure that you study (though without being over-anxious) so as to increase your knowledge a little at a time. In the meanwhile do what you can, with humility and simplicity. Put up with your own ignorance, without growing despondent.

Think over all that I have said, time and again, and the Lord will teach you to draw from these thoughts no small comfort. So have confidence and show a holy cheerfulness! May our Lord Jesus Christ bless you and all your companions.

A. ROSMINI p.

162. To the novice Costanza Samonini with the Sisters of Providence at Domodossola

Stresa, 12 December 1840

My dear daughter in Christ,

The two thoughts which are upsetting you, and which you tell me about in your letter, are clearly devices of the devil, which you must avoid and overcome with the prudence of Christ. The first is certainly from the evil one, because it belittles the infinite goodness of God who wants us all to become holy, who calls us to himself and helps us; who came on earth expressly for our sake and died to save us.

The second thought, too, comes from the devil, because it leads you to evade the judgement of your Superiors and prevents you from devoting yourself entirely to your sublime and holy vocation. I call your vocation *sublime and holy* because it is founded on love of your neighbour, the thing which is most dear to the heart of Jesus. Nothing we can do is more pleasing to that Sacred Heart than to consecrate ourselves wholly to the exercise of charity towards our neighbour; for Christ has said that this is *his commandment*, and that he takes as done to himself what we do for our neighbour, and especially for children.

So drive out of your heart those thoughts, and make a firm resolution to follow this beautiful vocation, if you are a lover of Jesus Christ. For this is what he wants: this is what he requires of you. Remember that a vocation is a great gift, and one that we have to support and develop through our wholehearted co-operation with grace. If you so act you will become holy. Pray for me.

Your father in Christ,

A. ROSMINI p.

163. To Don Bernardo Mazzi in Genoa

Stresa, 17 December 1840

My dear friend and brother in Christ,

It greatly consoles me to hear that you are happy and full of trust in God. We have to abandon ourselves to him without reserve, so that we may find in him all our good, our happiness, and everything. So as you put it, let the enemy grasp smooth stones: they will graze his hands none the less.

Thank you for telling me about the views current in Genoa concerning my *Treatise on Conscience*. The only thing that I deplore is that in your account you begin by making excuses as though these things were other than dear to me, and that on your part you had not shown me true friendship by recounting them. On the contrary, the prudence shown by the distinguished people you name is not something I share. In the first place, I do not believe that I have done any harm to the saints, and much less to their holiness, as those you quote maintain. I believe rather that the beloved St Alphonsus, and Segneri, in their glory in heaven, regard favourably what I say, and take my remarks as acts of devotion on my part⁶⁰. And in the second place, I believe that modern incredulity cannot be changed to belief by pretence or deceit, but only by the utmost sincerity and impartiality. So you see that my rules of prudence are quite different from those to which many people appeal. In a word, my prudence is TRUTH. Truth is what I trust in: only this can convert the incredulous, and nothing else can do this. For nothing else can say: 'I AM THE TRUTH'. I should like to dwell at some length on this subject, for I am full of it. Dear God, you know well enough how the 'prudent people' of our day have jeopardized the cause of our faith! But you have quoted: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart. Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?' So let us have nothing to do with dissimulation and pretence. Let us leave these things to the factions which men form. The clergy, this union of the ministers of Jesus Christ, must never be a faction. Its sole duty is to preach *the truth*; its one weapon is *the truth*. Alas for those who do not believe in the divine power of this weapon! Goodbye my dear brother.

Yours in Christ,

A. R.

⁶⁰ See also *Vita di A Rosmini*, vol. 11, p.73 and E.C. 8038.

164. To Don Giuseppe Gagliardi⁶¹, parish priest of Agrano

Stresa, 24 December 1840

My dear brother in Christ,

I think it better that you should not say anything about your decision to your parishioners before you leave, and that you wait, too, to inform your relatives until you are at Calvario. There, where the crucified Lord awaits you, because from now on you will share his resting-place on the cross, you will soon begin to free yourself from all your needs, and fly with the wings of a dove touched with the gold and silver of love of God and of neighbour. Take with you a great heart full of holy desires; and let the first of these be that of becoming most learned in the doctrine of *self-contempt*, the foundation of the whole Society to which God is calling you, and into which he now introduces you, leading you by the hand through his most adorable Providence. Let the sacrifice be complete: give everything to God, so as never to take back anything of what you have given him - or rather restored to him. Dispose of your worldly possessions in the best way possible, viewing these matters with the eyes of your soul before God. Take with you to Calvario your books and anything else you can, with the intention of consecrating all to the Lord and no longer owning anything on earth.

I will inform the good Father Master of your arrival: you will find in him a true friend. I embrace you tenderly in the heart of our God, who emptied himself, taking the form of a little child as an example to us. Praise be to Jesus!

Your brother in Christ,

A. ROSMINI p.

⁶¹ Gagliardi entered the Institute a few days afterwards. He had been born at Oleggio (Novara) in 1812, and he died at Rovereto in 1881. He was Rector of several houses and colleges of the Institute, and he left a good reputation as a gifted student of natural history, as well as an unassuming religious.

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21	519	3234	51	550	3480	81	581	3720
22	520	-	52	551	3486	82	582	3735
23	521	3282	53	552	3487	83	583	3752
24	522	3288	54	553	8008	84	584	3755
25	523	3316	55	554	3516	85	585	3760
26	524	3324	56	555	3526	86	586	3759
27	525	3327	57	556	3529	87	587	3768
28	526	3329	58	557	3537	88	588	3778
29	527	3330	59	558	3547	89	589	3786
30	528	3345	60	559	3572	90	590	3787

91	591	3788	116	620	3903	140	648	4024
92	592	3792	117	621	3911	141	649	4025
93	594	3799	118	622	3923	142	650	4026
94	595	3801	119	623	3926	143	651	4027
95	596	3802	120	624	3930	144	652	4033
96	597	3804	121	625	3931	145	653	4044
97	598	3815	122	626	3939	146	654	4046
98	599	3820	123	627	3942	147	655	4053
99	600	3821	124	628	3948	148	656	4065
100	602	3840	125	629	3949	149	657	4066
101	604	3843	126	630	3951	150	658	4070
102	605	3845	127	631	3952	151	660	4077
103	606	3854	128	632	3963	152	661	4078
104	607	3855	129	633	3966	153	662	4096
105	608	3859	130	636	3980	154	663	4098
106	609	3862	131	637	3982	156	665	8036
107	610	3864	132	638	3983	157	667	4119
108	611	3870	133	639	3988	158	668	4128
109	613	3872	134	640	4006	159	669	4130
110	614	3873	135	641	4008	160	670	4131
111	615	3875	136	642	4013	161	671	4137
112	616	3877	137	644	4016	162	672	4144
113	617	3879	138	646	note 2	163	673	4147
114	618	3885	139	647	4022	164	674	4153
115	619	3890						

Note 1: This letter is not in E.C., but can be found in *Avvisi Spirituali XII*, pp.55-6. [Turin 1890]. A translation is contained in 'Spiritual Admonitions' XII, pp.38-9 [Market Weighton 1898].

Note 2: This too is to be found in the same booklets: *Avvisi Spirituali XIII*, pp.57-60; and 'Spiritual Admonitions' XIII, pp.40-2.