

1. To Suor Teresa Alvazzi at Domodossola

Stresa, 1 January 1841

My dear daughter in Christ,

You ask me whether we may get others to pray for our bodily health. My answer is that to pray for the good, even the temporal good, of our brothers and sisters in Christ is always an act of charity, provided that we ask for earthly benefits with a view to their spiritual good, and that we do so with submission to the will of God. Hence a Superior always does well to recommend Sisters who are ill to the prayers of the community - asking not simply for the restoration of their bodily health but so that God may grant them graces and blessings for both body and soul, as he sees fit.

As for getting others to pray for our own health, this is a less than perfect thing. However, to pray and ask others to pray that God may grant us patience and all the other virtues, while at the same time we value the cross of Jesus Christ as a treasure - that is a distinctly better thing to do.

All the same, at the times when we most feel our own weakness, we can cry out to God begging for his help and mercy; and we can turn trustfully to him and say: 'Father, if it is possible, let this chalice [of suffering] pass from me; but still let thy will, not mine, be done.' So we must learn to suffer willingly, and receive whatever comes to us from the hands of God with a tranquil mind and with great gratitude towards our Lord Jesus Christ. At the same time we have a duty to use every precaution open to us, so as not to aggravate needlessly any bodily ailments that God may send us.

May God bless you greatly in the year that is just beginning, and fill you with light, with fervour and with fortitude, so that you may serve him faithfully until death.

Your father in Christ,
A. R.

2. To Suor Maria Felice Stedile at Domodossola

Stresa, 1 January 1841

Here we are, my dear daughter, at the beginning of a new year. The Lord calls on us to begin a new life, and so we must put far from us all our past weaknesses and infidelities. Let us devote ourselves to his holy service with all our strength, and promise him that, with his help, we will never be discouraged, or heed the suggestions of our spiritual enemy, but go straight ahead on our way - the blessed way of our religious vocation, which our good Father has given us, and which leads directly to our heavenly home.

My daughter, God requires great things of you! He wants to see in you fortitude and constancy, not weakness or faint-heartedness. He wants you to be humble and obedient, mortified, resigned to his will and patient, full of zeal for the salvation of the souls for whose sake the Lord wants to use you, and ready to labour for them until death. You are to be full of charity towards the Sisters who are your companions in God's service, and full of esteem and love for your sublime vocation, which is incomparably more valuable than earthly life. God will not fail you: put your hopes in him, and do not be despondent if sometimes you fall into faults, but pick yourself up at once with renewed courage, trusting in his goodness and mercy. This is the grace I wish for you, and pray for from my heart, in this new year and in the future. These are the virtues that you are called to show. Pray likewise for me.

Your father in Christ,
A.R.

3. To Countess E. Frichignoso di Castellengo in Belgirate

Stresa, 1 January 1841

My dear Countess,

I have not here any relic of the wood of the cross. Otherwise I should have been very pleased to satisfy your wish at once and send you one. Nor can I suggest any source to which one could turn to obtain such a relic. But I will certainly make a point of seeking one out - and I am not without hopes of success in satisfying your wish.

Make it your care to cultivate the greatest possible trust in God: he is the true medicine for all our ills. Console yourself with the thought that the acts of hope and trust which are most pleasing to his divine majesty, and which obtain the most graces, are those that are made by a soul that is beset by the greatest physical and moral feebleness. At such times of despondency, the voice of the soul who humbles herself, cries out, and still hopes, reaches the very throne of God. It is the purest of voices, because it is the voice of faith, a wholly spiritual voice, with nothing of the body in it. When our prayer is aimed simply at attaining spiritual benefits, *gospel virtues*, it nourishes hope and is a copious source of graces. When our sadness is involuntary, it is a burden, an affliction which, when borne with resignation, also serves to purify the soul and cancel out its faults. It is for this reason that God allows it. If I had to suggest to you a remedy against all discouragement and sadness, I would advise you to turn to the words of our Lord himself as the evangelists report them. They are full of delight and bring peace to the heart.

My poor prayers will not be lacking for the person you recommend; and for my part I ask you to pray for me.

I wish you every good, together with heavenly consolation, in the year we have just begun.

Yours sincerely,
A. R.

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

Stresa, 18 January 1841

My dear brother in our Lord Jesus Christ,

You did well not to let it be seen on the title-page of your book, *The Pillar and Ground of Truth* (of which, you tell me, you have sent six copies to me in Paris) that you are a member of the Institute. To have done so would have been contrary to the section of the Constitutions entitled *De actione individuali huius Societatis* [The actions of individuals within the Society]. Here it is stated that the activity of the Institute is never to be made public without necessity, but only that its individual members may be mentioned in connection with anything they do external to the Institute itself. All the same, none of our members must have anything printed without the permission of Superiors. It is for these to decide whether a member's name should appear at the front of a book or not. Generally speaking it is preferable that those members who write books should not append their names to their first publications, because (apart from the fact that these are often imperfect) publication of a book can easily allow vanity to enter into the writer, through the activity of the devil, especially if the book is praised. Instead then, each of us should want to withhold his name from such publications; and the Superior should not direct that it should appear in every case, or at random, but only when, after

weighing the matter before God, he finds that it would make for the glory of God. Make sure that such a wish to 'be unknown and little esteemed' is instilled well into the minds and hearts of our men, and applied to particular circumstances, because it is one of the main principles of our Institute. And do not be scandalized when you see me put my name on books. I have omitted it when possible, and still make this my practice. But in the compilation made by Pogliani, and in other works, I put my name, because the publisher made this a condition, and because this was the advice of my friends and those who direct me. Take notice though that the faculties I give you do not include that of authorizing anyone to add to his name his membership of the Institute - for the reason I gave above. In your personal diary you should note down carefully the faculties you have received, so that you do not exceed them.

I rejoiced in the Lord over the account you gave me of your visit to dear Don Luigi [Gentili]; and what most pleased me was to hear of the perfect charity which exists between you. My dear brother, let us make every effort to see that there is always among us the most perfect agreement and union of hearts; for it is in this way that we shall obey the command of our Lord Jesus Christ which is of the essence of the Institute into which God has gathered us.

I embrace all our dear brethren in the heart of Jesus, and I implore of him that unending blessings may come down on you all. Goodbye.

Yours affectionately in Christ,
ROSMINI P.

5. To Suor Teodora Piroia

Stresa, 22 January 1841

My dear daughter in Christ,

I can see from your letter what fears are disturbing your soul - fears that lead you to wonder whether you are falling short over your religious duties, to the point where you think you are in danger of being tempted against your vocation and losing your soul. It is important to see what is the source of these fears; to search out humbly whether they are the result of some defect or a hidden internal fault. If something of this sort is what is disturbing you, it is a matter of overcoming the enemy by *using force and violence*. Normally the vices that lie hidden in souls and harm them (as wood-worms and weevils damage wood) are the ones that arise in us out of self-love. And if you want my help over your situation, I would suggest that you first pray humbly and fervently, asking God to give you the light to discern what are the most deeply hidden faults within your soul, so that you can grieve over them without being discouraged and courageously confess them. After that, consider with all tranquillity of mind these points: (1) Am I *simple* and sincere in all my thoughts, words and actions, or am I in any way devious? This is an important point, my daughter: simplicity is necessary if we are to obtain abundant grace from God.; (2) Am I *poor in spirit*? That is, am I content to be humbled, to take the lower place, to submit equally to all my companions, to receive no honour, no esteem, no earthly reward for what I do? Do I imitate my meek and gentle model, Jesus, by accepting with humble resignation all the things that wound my self-love, and do I have written in my heart and meditate continuously on those divine words: 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me'? (3) Do I comply with the ideas and wishes of my immediate Superior, support and comfort her in her trials by my charity, humility, submission, docility and obedience? Do I take in good part and put the best interpretation on everything she says and does, showing her trust, gratitude and affection, as a true and genuine religious

should? (4) Do I preserve interior calm and peace of mind, meekness and the gentleness of charity? Or do I become angry, heated and upset, speak and act out of passion? Do I take a distorted view of things and exaggerate in my account of them?

My dear daughter, our only good consists in *amending our lives and doing violence to our faults*. The more we purify our souls, the happier we shall feel, and the more grace we shall receive from God. If we aim at holiness and accuse ourselves, God will look on us with eyes of mercy. So never lose heart: ask always for the gifts of *simplicity* and *spiritual strength*. We need to be strong enough to recognize our own defects without being cast down, and to combat them with trust in divine grace. So take courage! No one can be crowned victorious without first doing battle; and if you fight *against yourself*, relying on the power of Christ, you will overcome and receive the crown. Goodbye. Pray for -

Your affectionate father in Christ,
R.

6. To Suor Anna Maria Alvazzi at Intragna

Stresa, 22 January 1841

My dear daughter in Christ,

God gives Superiors the opportunity to sanctify themselves through the *charity, prudence and fortitude* that they show towards their subjects. Ask God for these virtues and he will grant them to you. Never be afraid, in spite of the difficulties you meet with, because through constancy, perseverance and trust in God's help you will overcome all your problems, and also do great good to the souls of your companions. But all this *takes time*, and you have to study their individual temperaments, and treat them always with kindness and prudence, too.

As for the Sister you mention, since you have placed her in the senior school, leave her there - but inform Carissima Madre. For the rest, 'Superiors of small houses may not move a Sister from one school to another without first obtaining permission for this.' Let this be your rule.

As for the horary, arrange this in consultation with the Locarno Superior. Make sure that it makes for the greater good of the children, and give due weight also to the suggestions of the Inspector of Schools: try to satisfy him, provided that his ideas do not conflict with the rules (which of course he is not familiar with).

If it should seem to you that you cannot always satisfy the local people, do not be at all worried about this, my dear daughter. It is enough if you make sure that you please God: and God is pleased whenever you do what little your knowledge and capacity are equal to with the help of his grace. It is God alone whom you seek; and he is the only one you have to please. That is the sum of it. As for other people, it is good if you are humbled before them. Have no fear: take care that you do not let timidity rule your actions. Sisters have to show both strength and tranquillity in all circumstances. Goodbye. Pray for me.

Your father in Christ,
ROSMINI p.

It was Rosmini's wish that the Sisters should address their Superior General as 'Carissima Madre' (literally, 'Dearest Mother').

7. To Don Luigi Gentili at Grace Dieu

Stresa, 24 January 1841

My dear brother and fellow-servant of our Lord,

I am very willing that an English version of the certificate of ascription should be made, and I will write about it to the Vice-Provincial, giving him the necessary faculty, and appropriate instructions. At the same time, we must take care that ascription does not degenerate into a mere formality, or become *a society only in name, useless for the kingdom of God*. So it must be wholly the work of the mercy, grace and Providence of our Lord, since all our actions must be moved by and depend on the known will of God. Therefore in this matter too we must observe faithfully that excellent rule that is so dear to us: 'neither to urge nor to invite anyone to become ascribed'. In this way we can be sure that those who join themselves to us are sent by God. If a great many were to enter at one time there would be a danger of our not being able to help them. This is because we are always intent on helping *souls*; and by so acting, doing all possible good to our neighbour with unbounded charity. I foresee that ascription may do great, *very great* things in England if it is introduced wisely, *with the wisdom and holiness of God*, especially in the early days. Ascription is not to be confused with the Third Order of St Francis or with ascription to other religious Orders. It has some similarity with those things; but it is also greatly different from them. So if we led people to think that ascription to the Institute was all of a piece with ascription to other Orders, this would give them a wrong idea, and would prejudice the good that could be done. So we must avoid this, but at the same time we ought not to present it as something *totally different*, since this is not the case. It has an analogy with these other sorts of ascription, but its real nature ought to become clear by itself - through good works rather than by any words of ours.

Meanwhile it is very necessary for us all to study the nature of our ascription and give thought to the great advantages that could be drawn from it, if we learn how to profit from this powerful means [of doing good]. For ascription to be useful in this way, it must be organized in accordance with the *Constitutions*; and it will be the responsibility of the Vice-Provincial to suggest to me, little by little, as opportunity offers, what means are needed to develop the necessary organization. Once I have approved of these, they can be put into effect over there. As soon as the ascribed members are organized, and group associations (sodalities) are formed, then great good will come of them. For whereas ascription in general is something passive rather than active, looking to the cultivation of devotion, piety and above all purity of conscience, the sodalities are active: they are, so to speak, the tireless hands with which in time the members will come to exercise charity towards others.

But for all this to happen it is essential that the focus of ascription, the Institute itself, to which ascription is complementary, should be distinguished by great holiness and possess the wisdom in the art of governing which can only be communicated by the Spirit of Christ. May God bless your labours! May he grant you an abundant harvest, descendants more numerous than the stars of heaven, the sands of the sea! May the blessed Virgin inspire your thoughts and words, and guide your steps! May she bring it about that your efforts result in treasures of virtue, humility, charity, simplicity and holiness; in peace, consolation and eternal glory! Amen.

Yours in Christ,
ROSMINI p.

In July 1840 Fr Pagani had been appointed Vice-Provincial in England.

8. To Don Giovanni Battista Pagani at Prior Park

Stresa, 24 January 1841

I would approve, *if you too do so*, of the suggestion of dear Gentili - that an English version of the certificate of ascription should be produced. In the form of words it must be made clear what is the spirit of ascription. It consists of two things: (1) *A union of Catholics* who encourage one another to carry out in practice the law of perfection taught us by our Lord Jesus Christ. Its aim is to bring it about that all Catholics may be united by the closest bonds of charity, *self-controlled, upright and godly in this world*; and that each one should be perfect in carrying out the duties belonging to their state and their position in society, whatever this may be; (2) *The exercise of universal and boundless charity*, according to the words of St Paul (Phil 4:8) and of the *Song of Songs* (8:7). But all this must come about without any strain, with complete liberty of heart and of will. No one should feel obliged to anything specific, but each one is to act freely according to his own spirit in the Lord, while we ourselves joyfully encourage all people of good will, so that *all may praise the Lord*.

This does not mean that there are no general rules and no particular obligations; but these relate to the Society as a whole, not to individuals. While the Society does not impose its rules on individuals, these of their own accord bind themselves more or less closely to the Institute, according to the call of the Holy Spirit, either by forming associations or by acting individually. When you have drawn up the form of words, clearly and briefly, send it to me in English, together with an exact Italian translation.

Goodbye. Send this letter to Gentili, and inform him about Lady Wellesley, if you have made her an ascribed member, as well as about anyone else you enrol.

Yours affectionately in Christ,
R. p.

9. To Suor Maria Francesca Parea in Locarno

Stresa, 31 January 1841

My dear daughter in Christ,

When you are speaking to the Director about your spiritual state, first be sure your intention is upright, telling God that you do not wish to speak out of vanity; and then tell everything with simplicity - because you cannot go wrong if you are simple and sincere with your Director, Don Carlo, and with the other Superiors. If in the course of what you say you tell him of your thoughts against charity, this does not amount to grumbling about other people: rather, it is self-accusation, provided that you do so with an upright intention, blaming and condemning yourself. So do not be afraid of acting like this - always doing so opportunely and with sincerity. For it would not be at all good were you to speak, for instance, when your Superiors themselves wished you to be silent.

When you accuse yourself in confession there is no need to go into minute detail: it is enough to make clear the substance of the sin, without naming persons, particularly where venial sins are concerned. But act always with a pure intention. In other words, you mean to do what is right; and it is better not to be long-winded and burden the confessor with details which are irrelevant to the sin and do not aggravate the offence. For a Sister of Providence ought to know how to make a good confession with few and precise words.

Continue, then, to ask God for occasions of humbling yourself and accepting sufferings - but at the same time always pray that he will give you the grace to bear them. When you pray for humility and a love of suffering, you are asking everything: for

these virtues also include praying for grace and strength. So never cease to desire and ask for such beautiful virtues, such precious gifts.

You yourself must make the noviciate into what you hope to see: look on yourself as a novice, and act like one. In this way you will acquire greatness of soul.

(. . .)Take courage, and refer all your problems to God, from whom you will receive light and help, if you wait with faith. May our Lord Jesus Christ bless you all.

Your father in Christ,
A. ROSMINI, Provost General

10. To Don Luigi Gentili at Grace Dieu in England

Stresa, 2 February 1841

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

I have received your account, and I have given thanks to God, and got others to do so, at the news about the Protestants who have returned to the bosom of their Mother, the Church. May God make use of you to bring into the banqueting hall of the Lord those who are gathered on the highways! Further than that, I want all those who enter to be clothed in wedding garments: in other words, I want all those you have the grace to receive into the Church to be well instructed and *to have an upright intention*. I should like them to be like the converts made by St Francis Xavier, who were known (it is said) by their virtue and perseverance.

I am sorry that you are short of money. But make sure that the little you can give is well spent, with nothing wasted. May no-one be attracted by things that perish, but only by what is incorruptible. And with this in mind, I am glad that, like the apostle, you can say: 'gold and silver have I none.' All your gold consists in the grace of Jesus Christ. For the rest, if in the future God should give you something that you can give away, it will be well if you distribute it with the prudence which the Holy Spirit alone can infuse into you.

I embrace you in the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Goodbye.

Yours affectionately,
R.

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

Stresa, 2 February 1841

My dear brother in Jesus Christ,

The question you put to me in connection with Mr Spencer persuades me that you would find it useful to have by you a sound treatise on the religious life. The biggest one is that of Suarez, and I should like you to have all his works. But the finest treatment of the religious life is that of Piatti, though it is narrower in scope than that of Lessio. For simple souls I like best the booklet of Fr Natale, *Heaven on Earth*. But you always have to bear in mind that what is said by those who write about the religious life is only valid for us to the extent that it is not opposed to 'the spirit and the letter of our Constitutions'. This is because our Society differs greatly from all the other religious congregations because of its simplicity and universality. In the Suarez work you will find in abundance what you will need in order to instruct Mr Spencer and put right his ideas about the religious vows.

In the meantime you can tell him that ‘the apostles were truly, very truly, religious as far as the essence is concerned, and that they made perpetual vows - since they bound themselves irrevocably and perpetually to the following of Christ’. It is this perpetual and irrevocable sacrifice of oneself which constitutes the excellence of the religious vows. It involves the unlimited consecration of oneself; something that is not to be found in the rest of the faithful. Mr Spencer must remember that it is from the Church, our Teacher, that the true doctrine concerning the religious vows is to be received. Now the Church holds and always has held the religious vows in the highest esteem, and always considers persons consecrated in this way to the Lord as *the most specially chosen part of the flock of Christ*. He should consider too that the perfection of the gospel consists in the *denial of self*: ‘Anyone who wants to follow me must deny himself’. It is only in religious life that ordinarily and perfectly there is to be found the *effective* denial of self, through the force of *obedience* and *indifference*; for in these circumstances all actions come not of our own will, but out of obedience - which is as much as to say from the will of God, known in the most certain way. How can someone who is not in religion have the merit of obedience in everything? It is true that diocesan priests are answerable to their bishops; but religious are immediately answerable to the first Bishop, the successor of St Peter, the supreme Vicar of Christ; and they are bound to the Church in a more wonderful unity. Moreover, in practice the obedience which diocesan priests give to their bishops is broad, and is concerned with external works rather than with the direction of their own souls. Whereas in religion subjection to Superiors includes a most valuable direction of the souls of those under them. It would not be easy to expound all the many advantages which good religious enjoy as a result of being thus directed. They can always profit from the advice and guidance of their Superiors; they have before them the living example of the virtues of their brethren, as well as constant and enjoyable conversation with them; they share with them in prayer and holy works, and they are blessed with the indulgences granted by the Sovereign Pontiffs. Their life is blessed with regularity and mutual charity; and above all they need take no thought for their temporal needs, but can give their minds wholly and solely to the things of God.

Who then could estimate the vastly greater good that can be done by their united efforts directed wholly to one end, as against the dispersed and fragmented efforts of individuals? So anyone who loves God without limit and wishes to co-operate in producing the greatest good - the maximum fruit that God expects his vine to show - can do no less than want to see the union of all good people, and to give himself to the strictest and widest possible association with them: which is much as to say he will want to join the religious life.

My fondest greetings to you all in the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

A. R.

12. To Don Giuseppe Setti at Domodossola

Stresa, 15 February 1841

My dear brother in Christ,

I particularly urge you to take the greatest possible care of those in your charge. Do not limit yourself to externals, but make every spiritual effort to address yourself to the needs of their souls. But a great obstacle to achieving this is the sort of false prudence which fears to give offence by probing the wound. But this is not the way the expert doctor works: he is not satisfied unless he devotes all his efforts to reaching to the very root of the illness. So have no hesitation in searching out especially the self-love which

through its hidden workings causes so much deception. If you do this you will make your subjects holy by removing their principal enemy and making them meek, adaptable, obedient and open to guidance. Whereas if you let them indulge their self-love you will find them stubborn and ill-humoured, and you will not know why this is so. This solicitude of yours must be continuous: it is not enough to spare the occasional thought to it; rather, it must be the preoccupation of your whole life. All your love must be concerned for this end, and it must never rest or sleep. This applies to all those under you.

You need to take particular care of the scholastics, whose Master you must be, helping and guiding the progress of all of them, so that they may advance both spiritually and intellectually. Look on them as your own dear children. Ask the Lord for light and holiness to communicate to them, and he will grant you both in abundance. A Superior's tongue should always be busy, chiefly in *giving instruction* to suit every occasion. I embrace you tenderly and bid you goodbye.

Yours affectionately in Christ,
A. R.

13. To Don Paolo Barola in Rome

Stresa, 21 March 1841

My dear friend and brother in Jesus Christ,

Thank you for your letter of 2 March and the news you give me. I beg you to keep in touch frequently, so that I may use the information, simply for the glory of God, to whom through his mercy I always direct my thoughts. Do not think for a moment that these matters astonish me or arouse any bitterness in me, as you put it. Either because I am too dull of mind or for some other reason, I never experience such things where my own affairs are concerned. On the other hand I believe that the light of truth cannot easily or soon overcome ingrained prejudices; but I am confident that it will do so in the end. My hopes over this are based on trust in the goodness of God, who loves men and wishes them to know the truth ever better - and so know him, who is Truth, so that they may become holy through this knowledge. I am fully persuaded (and for goodness' sake do not attribute this to presumption on my part, for God knows that I truly look on myself as unworthy of any favour) - I am persuaded that my teachings are from God, and that it is he alone who communicates such knowledge to me. I would add too that he does this without the intervention of any significant human means but solely through the light of his grace. This does not imply that I consider myself infallible, God forbid. I realize that I am capable of mixing in with what the Lord reveals to me some valueless ideas of my own. I certainly do this to some extent; and whether I do so in greater or lesser degree can readily be recognized by anyone at all, and especially discerned by those who are gifted by God. All this is strictly between ourselves.

So please continue to tell me about any published works that have a bearing on my ideas, or which contain any discussion of them (even if you cannot send them to me).

Believe me, I pity those who reflect so little and yet make facile judgements.

You speak too of the examination that is being made there [in Rome] of something I wrote about the teaching of my beloved Alphonsus Liguori. I am not aware that I have written anything other than what you have read in *The History of Systems of Morality* and in my *Treatise on Conscience*. I believe that what I stated in those books if properly understood will be considered as a defence of that holy man, as well as a warning to anyone who may misunderstand him and misuse his doctrine. Tell me your own frank opinion. The Church's enemies today can only be overcome by complete

sincerity, by reasoning and by a pure and impartial love of truth. I therefore wait for you to keep me well-informed over all this.

Pray for me, my dear brother and faithful friend in the Lord, and believe that I am -

Yours most affectionately,
ROSMINI p.

14. To Don Pietro Rigler at Trent

Stresa, 2 April 1841

My dear Father and brother in Christ,

Allow me to treat you with the Christian familiarity that I have used with you for many years, and which I should like you to continue to show me. Your welcome letter of 18 March caused me a mixture of thankfulness and fear. First I was truly grateful for your friendly frankness in telling me about the serious decision you are on the point of making. But I must openly admit that I felt much hesitation over the actual course you have in mind. Frankness, which I think is part of my character, and which in any case I consider a duty, does not allow me to reply to you simply in terms of congratulation (as would be the worldly convention), for I am prevented from doing so when I remember those words which are close to my heart: *If I should aim to please men, I should not be the servant of Christ*. So forgive me if I open my heart to you - not to give you advice, but simply to tell you what reflections your letter gave rise to in me, so that even if there is nothing of use to you in them, they will at any rate be a sign of my affection for you.

First, then, it does not seem to me that you entered the Institute of Charity because you believed that 'you could both be under my authority and also continue in your first occupation as a teacher in Trent.' Instead you entered it ready to obey any command, as *perfect religious obedience* requires. To start with, you read the *Memorial*, and saw the *universality* of the charity which Christ came to teach and which the Institute takes as its foundation; and like the other brethren you promised to aim at that indifference so dear to us - *indifference to any place, to any grade and to any position*. Otherwise I could not have accepted you, even for a trial period. So I do not see how you can say that the wish of the Bishop constitutes an obligation for you (unless you made him a vow that I do not know about). For while the will of the Bishop is certainly a sign of the will of God, yet the Church sets a limit to this rule, and declares that the Bishop's wishes have force only when they are not opposed to what is more perfect, as is *the entire sacrifice of oneself to the universal charity of Christ*. For the will of the Bishop can never stand in the way of *perfection*, as St Paul says: *We cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth*. And a little later: *the authority that the Lord has given me [is] for building up and not for tearing down*.

I cannot believe (at least with such insight as I have at present) that the course you are about to take is an improvement on what has gone before. You adduce as your reason submission to the Bishop; but now you are about to vow obedience to a layman. You are entering a knightly order which no longer has either the aim or the customs which it originally had. And all this [you say] is in order to satisfy the internal impulse you have felt since you were a boy to enter religious life. You think that you will find peace of mind through taking religious vows; but this too could be an illusion. After you have gone through the external ceremony I doubt if you will be more obedient than you were before, or more observant of poverty, or practise greater self-denial, or be more indifferent. I doubt if you will make more progress in universal charity (which is the

heart of everything). Perhaps instead these solemn vows will be for you a cushion on which you can rest more comfortably.

I assure you that if someone were to come to me saying that he wanted to enter a religious Order, but first made it a condition that he wished to work outside the Order, I think my reply would be: 'What you tell me is a clear sign that you do not have a vocation: for if you had a vocation to that Order, you would certainly want to devote yourself wholly to it - to work and die in it and for it. But from the fact that right at the beginning you want both to belong to that Order and yet to work outside it, it is clear that you are deceived. Anyone with a true vocation would never have such thoughts or wishes.' Yes, my dear brother in Jesus Christ, this notion of travelling by two different roads does not please me. You must choose one or the other. You need to overcome the uncertainty of character you show - and you can do so if you really want to.

Will you have less love for me because I speak to you so frankly? Will you think me presumptuous for urging you to reflect on the decision you are about to take? Ah, if you do, you will show that you certainly do not know what is in my heart. I will always be to you what I have been up to now -

Your humble, sincere, and affectionate servant and brother in Christ,
A. ROSMINI p.

PS Could you give the retreat this year to the clergy of Rovereto? Try your utmost to say 'yes'. Or at least give the *instructions*, and I will give the *meditations*.

Rigler had considered entering the Order of Teutonic Knights, which had Archduke Maximilian as its Grand Master.

15. To Suor M. Lucia Taveggia at Biella

Stresa, 14 April 1841

My dear daughter in Christ,

How many problems and how much misery we create for ourselves! And why? Because we let our thoughts wander where they should not go. A true daughter and Sister of Providence does not think of anything other than the duties she is devoted to, and so she lives tranquilly in simplicity, and God never abandons her. But if her thoughts are on other things - as was the case with you, when you dwelt on the possibility of being sent away from the Institute - she is all at once upset and cast down.

Be at peace, then: think about what you ought to think about: in other words, concentrate on carrying out your duties well and making progress in virtue. Then you will have no further anxiety. Pray for -

Your affectionate father in Christ,
A. ROSMINI p.

16. To Don Luigi Gentili at Grace Dieu

Stresa, 15 April 1841

My dear brother in Christ,

While I sympathize with your wish to help those poor people, I would not want that desire to be inordinate, for this would certainly be a source of temptation and cause you disturbance of mind. But if it is holy and kept within bounds it will neither bring you disquiet nor lessen your obedience and submission to Superiors - the things that alone

enable you to do the will of God, which is the only good that is genuine and does not deceive us. For remember that even the desire to do good can involve delusions; whereas the submission of our own judgement and the renunciation of things that seem good yet get in the way of obedience can never deceive us. Ponder well on the fact that God does not expect from you more than you can give: and you can give only what obedience allows. To be dissatisfied over this because you would love to do more is a sort of temerity: it is presumptuous, a lack of trust in God - in short a temptation of the devil. For goodness' sake, my dear Gentili, stick firmly to these fundamental and infallible principles of our vocation. If you are faithful to these, you may be certain that one day the words of the psalm will be realized: *'The voice of rejoicing and salvation [is heard] in the tents of the righteous.'*

When I feel that anyone is wavering over these basic principles I am fearful. Without them we shall only be building our house on sand. So put to flight the temptations you mention in your letter: humbly make a sacrifice of yourself to God; do not attempt things beyond your power. Remember the proverbs, 'More haste, less speed', and 'slow but sure.' What would be the outcome if when you were trying to do too much, God should let you fall halfway? Would it not have been better to go no further than your Superiors wished, but at the same time have God's help? And you will have his help if you put all your trust in *obedience*. But it will be a different story if in any way, directly or indirectly, on whatever pretext, through any sophism or ingenious argument, you find some way of *eluding* the law of obedience.

So act faithfully, with moderation, and with a spirit that is tranquil and firmly committed to your holy vocation. It is quite unworthy of a religious of our Institute to say like a child: 'other missionaries do this, or that, and I cannot act differently.' Instead each of us should say: 'I have consecrated myself to God not so that I can do what other missionaries do, but to make myself an entire holocaust to the Lord in obedience, in poverty, in self-denial, in humbling myself, and in all the other virtues taught to me by my crucified Lord. This is what I vowed: in this I shall find peace of soul. *I will both lie down and sleep in peace; for you alone make me lie down in safety.*' Happy are these thoughts in which the timid soul finds refuge and retreat. *The high hills are a refuge for the wild goats, and rabbits hide in the rocks.*

It is easy to make a good start: the difficult thing is to continue steadily without running into trouble. *Not he that begins, but he that perseveres* etc. If you are to keep out of trouble - especially one in your position - much foresight is needed. And true foresight is only given to someone who is obedient and trusts in God. If we have great success in the beginning, we may be deluded and our hearts may be puffed up. Then we imagine that we can do great things, and we no longer recognize that we are capable of nothing; then we dare to pass the limits set by God, and in the midst of our apparent success we fall shamefully to the ground, mocked by the evil spirits who have deceived us by feeding our self-love and inflaming our imagination.

All the same, you can be sure that I am by no means insensitive to the needs of those poor people. To believe that your Superiors were lacking in charity and failed to understand your situation, or knew nothing about it, would be a rash judgement - the sort of thing with which the father of lies lures minds astray, as he did with Eve. But even if this were really the case, there always remains the rock of obedience, to which the true Christian must always cling blindly.

So, my dear Gentili, comfort me with a letter showing your clear grasp of the *true principles* which form the piety, the holiness, of the Institute. I would remind you that the thought that you are *on your own* there greatly grieves me; but give me proof of the sound reasoning and the wise prudence required of someone in your situation. I embrace you lovingly. Pray for him who is, in the heart of Jesus -

Your most affectionate servant and brother,

17. To Don Pietro Rigler at Trent**Stresa, 22 April 1841**

My dear Father,

Your firm conviction that you have a vocation to the Teutonic Order leads me to hope that God, the Master of us all, has granted you special enlightenment. No doubt you will have had the idea examined also by some wise guide who is gifted with the spirit of God. If we are able to talk together during the holidays I shall be able to hear more about what you promise to tell me, and this will finally persuade me that the step you have in mind really has been suggested to you by the *Father of lights*. But you must not believe that when I wrote my previous letter to you I had fears regarding the salvation of your soul. I know very well that this could only be a consequence of mortal sin. No, my anxiety was concerned solely about a greater or lesser degree of perfection. For since every such grade is an infinite treasure, it is right that it should be the object of both our fears and our hopes. If then a clear and calm light from God, and the advice of your spiritual director shows you that this is indeed the right way for you, then enter upon it without delay, for *the Lord leads just souls by right paths*. But first you need to have all this confirmed and approved by prudent persons. This you will have time to do this during your noviciate, so that you may not go back on the offering of yourself which you previously made when you entered the Institute of Charity, keeping back no part of the *pretium agri* [the price of the field - cf. Acts, 5:3] . For my part, I will not fail to offer my poor prayers for you; and I am sure you will do me the like charity. I embrace you ‘from a pure heart, a good conscience and unfeigned love’, and I am always in Jesus Christ -

Yours affectionately,
ROSMINI p.

18. To Canon Don Paolo Bertolozzi, in Lucca**Stresa 28 April 1841**

Your esteemed letter is a sign of true Christian friendship, such as one cannot forget. I thank you for it from my heart. You mention a pamphlet in circulation there too, though you have not seen it yourself. Neither have I been able to get hold of it. I learnt of its existence only a few days ago, when someone took it to His Eminence Cardinal Tadini of Genoa, and he showed it to a friend of mine. My friend went all over Genoa in search of it; but though all the bookshops knew of it, and everyone was talking about it, no one could say where it was to be found. I have reason to believe that a copy was sent to the Archbishop of Turin and to other prelates and magistrates. As soon as I succeed in getting hold of it I will let you know what it contains. But I can already tell you what is most important - and that is my faith, since I gather that this is what is being attacked. I have never pretended to be infallible: it would be a sad thing if the Christian faith were to be based on the infallibility of any mere man! No, it rests solely on the authority of God’s revelation of it; and it is God who makes the truth known to us by means of the Holy Church. It is on this authority that my faith, like the faith of any simple member of the Church, is based. So it is quite independent of any reasoning; and I have never put forward any reasoning of mine - God forbid! - in support of my faith, which I have always considered as of a wholly different nature. Hence I have always judged to be

false any reasoning which was in the slightest degree opposed to the authority of the Church. So if ever it should happen to me to make a judgement which I failed to notice was opposed to what this infallible authority had decided, this would simply prove my ignorance and faulty judgement, but would have no detrimental effect on my faith. For I was not born to be learned, or to acquire fame among men - nor have I ever directed my poor efforts to attain this. Rather I was born to be a believer and to be made worthy of the promises of Christ as a devoted son of his Church.

From this you will see that I make little account of whatever reputation as a man of letters you tell me I have previously acquired; and the conviction that I am ignorant does not worry me. What I treasure is our holy faith, and there lies my heart also. So should it happen (let us suppose) that the Holy Apostolic See, my Teacher, and the Teacher of all the world, were to find anything to censure in my writings, I should not find the slightest difficulty in making a public statement in order to clarify my steadfast belief. For anything I had said that was opposed to this belief, I would certainly have said unwittingly; and in retracting it I would simply be expressing my unchanging opinion, my permanent conviction, and correcting the faulty expression of this which failed to make clear and exact my inner belief - I mean my complete faith. Let me add this: I have always expressed my deep gratitude when anyone has demonstrated to me that I had erred in any way - as was my duty. Nor have I had any difficulty in correcting my mistake out of love for that truth which I aim at in all that I write; and if I have done this (and continue to do so) over relatively unimportant matters, how could I fail to do as much when it was a question so weighty as that of my religious belief, and I might not only offend against truth and harm my own soul but also risk the danger of teaching something erroneous to my neighbour? What have I ever wished to do, through my own poor writings, but to help souls? And shall I now set about perverting them? And that with my eyes open? God will never let this happen to me; I have total confidence in him alone over this - in him who infused faith in me as a child, and gave an unlimited devotion to the decisions of the Apostolic See and to him who spreads joy in my heart whenever I have occasion to make an act of faith, and who would make me almost want to fall into an involuntary error, provided that (without harm to anyone else) I should be able to make before him a more solemn and lofty profession [of faith].'

But you ask me whether there are involuntary errors in my works. I answer with St Paul, 'I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted.' You mention in your letter the errors of Baius, Quesnel, Jansen, Calvin and Luther; and even to hear these names terrifies me. The detestable errors of these heretics or followers of heretics have been most justly condemned by the Church; and together with the Church I have always condemned and detested them equally. How could I possibly follow in their steps? Could I wish to be a branch cut off from the vine, good for nothing but to be thrown on the fire? Good God - the mere thought of such a thing pains me greatly. The papal Bulls which condemned Jansenism in all its varieties are before my eyes; yet I cannot find a single idea in any of my works - and specifically in my *Treatise on Conscience*, (which I gather is made a special target) - which bears any resemblance to the condemned views of those innovators. Instead, on a number of occasions I cited the condemned propositions with a view to pointing out the mistaken path which the heretics had taken, and therefore the different road we must follow. More than once I made my own views clear in such a way as to leave no room for doubt. What is intended, then, by these accusations? Do you want me to say more about this, to open my inmost thoughts to you? Shall I tell you what I foresee as the result of this underhand attack now made on me? Listen kindly to what I frankly confide to you, and do not put down to any sort of presumption what I clearly discern and what my inner convictions tell me.

The author of this work (which is being secretly circulated) may have been motivated by zeal for the purity of the faith. But it is very likely that his heated imagination and his unfamiliarity with philosophical discourse and the rigorous style which I thought suitable to employ in the *Treatise on Conscience* (as in my other works) so as to reduce complicated questions to their simple principles, has caused his blunders. It is easy enough, by taking an isolated phrase, sometimes ill understood, to make it bear a meaning opposite to its true import; just as it is easy to put together passages so as to make them say just the opposite of what the author intended. As everyone knows, in the same fashion, using words taken from the gospel, it is possible to write the life of Cagliostro. But what is the result? Undoubtedly this fraudulent way of acting can give rise to whispering on all sides, especially when there are plenty of people who lend their ears readily to such things. And this leads to consternation of mind among good people, rejoicing among the evil-minded, and widespread suspicions among those in general who are unable to judge the merits of the opposing parties - and then an outburst of passion. This is just what was in the mind of the *enemy who sowed tares among the wheat*. I grieve over the harm to the common good: I grieve to see those who should be one with me divided in this way.

But when all is said and done, is there not a living God? Does not Christ reign? Does not he see into men's hearts? Does he not recognize his true servants? Does he not dispose all things for his glory and the good of his Church? What have we to fear? Shall I give him reason to say to me: 'O you of little faith, why did you doubt?' Certainly not, with the help of his grace. Has he not a Vicar on earth? Is not the Pope inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit? The judgements of the Holy See certainly have nothing in common with the rash and excited judgements of a few men who may perhaps be zealous, but not always 'according to understanding and knowledge'. So this is what will happen: the Holy See will examine everything with its customary calm impartiality, with inspired wisdom and prudence: it will go to the heart of the matter, and come to a decision with full knowledge and understanding of the question at issue. That judgement of the Holy See has always been and will continue to be my rule; and I will never cease to love this dear and kind guide which is so safe in all circumstances, no matter what it may prescribe. And what, in the end, will it decide? I will tell you what I am inwardly convinced of: it will not only judge my teachings to be sound and unblemished, and by its authority make them more useful to my neighbour, for whom I wrote, in the belief that I was setting down what the divine light suggested to me; but in addition the Holy See will recognize that there are in my teachings valid arguments with which to root out the errors of Jansen, Baius, Quesnel and the others previously mentioned - which was the aim I had in view in my work.

But always bear in mind that this conviction which both my conscience and my not inconsiderable knowledge of the matters I deal with in my writings force on me still has no connection with my faith. That is something simple and totally founded on God and his Holy Church.

I remain, with sentiments of sincere esteem and gratitude, your humble and grateful servant,

A. ROSMINI-SERBATI,
Provost General of the Institute of Charity

Canon Bertolozzi was then Bishop of Montalcino. (The pamphlet was entitled 'Some statements of Antonio Rosmini-Serbati, priest of Rovereto, with reflections by Eusebio Cristiano'. (This letter provides remarkable and admirable evidence of both Rosmini's simple and humble faith and his unshakeable attachment to the Apostolic See. It fully confirms the judgement passed on him by Pope Gregory XVI when he proclaimed Rosmini before the whole Church to be not only 'a man of eminent intellect, adorned

with noble qualities of soul, exceedingly famous for his knowledge of things human and divine, outstanding for his remarkable piety, religion, virtue, probity, prudence and integrity', but in addition 'conspicuous for his wonderful love and loyalty to the Catholic religion and this Apostolic See.' (Apostolic Letters *In sublimi*, by which Pope Gregory XVI solemnly approved the Institute of Charity on 20 September 1839.)

19. To Suor Anna M. Alvazzi at Intragna

Stresa, 29 April 1841

My dear daughter in Christ,

Do not be discouraged, but trust greatly in God and pray earnestly to him. He will give you the light to see that the difficulties and trials which arise from the imperfections of others, are great means for the sanctification of our souls and gaining merit for eternal life; and this *light*, which Jesus Christ will give you if you ask for it, will change the thorns into roses, the displeasing things into consolations. In your conferences speak often about the need for prayer (but in general terms): show that it is the one means by which we can acquire grace, carry out well the duties of our state, and become holy. Put forward the example of our Lord and of the saints, whose lives were all prayer; and do all you can to foster fervent prayer in yourself and in your companions. For the rest, tolerate things which are not wrong in themselves, and which do not lead to dissipation of spirit.

(. . .) Consult too with Suor Eusebia, who will be able to make known to her companion what her defects are. But above all, do not upset yourself: put all your hopes in God and pray.

Your father in Christ,
ROSMINI p.

20. To Don Paolo Barola in Rome

Stresa, 25 May 1841

My dear friend in the Lord,

Our friends are known in times of trial; and you have given me proof of your friendship in your kind letter regarding the storm raised against me. Let us open our hearts with confidence to the words of our Lord: 'Fear not, little flock'. This war is not made against me in particular but against the Institute of Charity: against this yet small flock of our Lord. The secret cry of those who think themselves powerful, believe they are secure, but are not, is 'Come, let us cunningly oppress him'. But this cunning and vicious assault, far from causing me dismay, makes me joyful when I look at what the long-term effects will be. The Lord permits this evil so as to draw from it some great good: I thank him for it with a joyful heart. I have now been able to lay hands on the libellous pamphlet which is being surreptitiously spread about in many parts of the

country [cf. Letter 18]. Not a single one of the accusations levelled against me is true. One after another they are a string of calumnies astutely pieced together. You will see the reply I am at present making; and you will see whether the words of the psalm are verified: 'he fell into the pit he dug.' Good people are praying for me: I am certain you will unite yourself with them as you promise. Keep me informed, I beg you, of all that is being said and done there, both by my friends and my enemies.

I place all my trust, after God, in our dear Mother and Leader, Mary; and as you wisely advise, I entrust to her the whole matter and remain entirely tranquil and at peace. The whole Institute is her child: let our Mother look after us. Meanwhile I can tell you that every day she grants me further graces, fresh consolations. But enough. I am writing briefly and in haste, because I want to give my attention every day to my little work. Greet most respectfully for me His Eminence Cardinal Pacca, as well as my friend Cardinal Castracane - who, I hope, will not fail to help me in my need.

Yours affectionately in Christ,
A. ROSMINI

21. To Don Luigi Gentili

Stresa, 3 June 1841

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

Your last letter banished the displeasure the previous one caused me. May God give you and preserve in you the true sentiments you express to me, for these are the only ones which can obtain from God blessings and lasting fruit. My dear brother, you now have close to you the small beginnings of a noviciate. Pray join yourself in strictest union with Father Vice-Provincial so as to give every help to this infant noviciate, which must be the apple of your eye. For from it will come all the good that the Institute will in time be able to do in that country. So aim at closest union of hearts in the Lord; simple and entire consensus of wills, with humility and that blind obedience which gives true peace of mind to the souls who love God; prudent advice based on the unvarnished truth. This is what we need if we are to commend ourselves to God so that he who is truth may destroy in us the passions arising from excessive fears and excessive hopes, and take away from us any reasonings that are too human, contrived or quibbling. Instead we must aim at frank, entire and exact dependence, without thought for the consequences, but with great trust in and abandonment to the Lord. In these beautiful days, may the Holy Spirit come down on all of you who are so dear to me, and especially on you, my Luigi. Goodbye.

Yours affectionately in Christ,
ROSMINI p.

22. To Don Paolo Barola in Rome

Stresa, 9 June 1841

My dear friend and brother in the Sacred Heart of Jesus,

Following your advice and that of other good friends I shall go to Milan the day after tomorrow to have my reply to Eusebio Cristiano printed, and as soon as this is done I will send you a copy.

I hope some good will come of this wretched affair. I am sorry that I had to say some hard things to this Eusebio; but since he is hiding under an assumed name I

cannot be doing any harm to his reputation. Although I would wish to deal with him and everyone else in mild and peaceful terms, yet after praying to the Lord and taking advice from wise heads, it seemed to me that I had to expose to the light of day the deceitful spirit, the ignorance and the errors of which the libel is full, without disguising the shame the author deserves. And this I do in no spirit of revenge - heaven preserve me from that! - but rather so that in this way my enemies may in future act in a more circumspect way. They are irked by the existence of our little Institute, protected by God as it is, like a little chicken beneath its mother's wings, and (as I see more clearly every day) protected by the cloak of Mary.

If you see His Eminence Cardinal Castracane, give him my deepest respects, and tell him that I see into his heart, and that he need not fear - just as I, trusting in the Lord, have no fear. We have to be convinced that whatever I do I cannot avoid the storm, and that I have to wait in tranquillity until the time when the Lord will command the winds and the sea to be calm. And what fine weather I can see will follow the tempest! I should like you to find a way to get the Cardinal to understand that it is not my writings that are the cause of this confrontation (they are merely the pretext), and also that there will never be any voluntary error in what I write - and I would hope no involuntary error either (I mean anything that would merit censure by the Church).

The true cause of the conflict lies deeper. The Institute of Charity is better known to the devil than to men, and he would like to deal with it without delay; but he will not succeed. We have to pray over this, my dear Don Paolo; for prayer is the most powerful weapon against the evil one; and we have to pray especially to the Blessed Virgin that she will crush him underfoot.

Keep me informed about everything. I should like to know if there is a special Commission appointed to examine my works, as seems to be supposed; and if so who are the members of it. Goodbye, my dear friend.

All yours,
ROSMINI p.

23. To Suor Felice Stedile at Domodossola

Stresa, 7 August 1841

My dear daughter in Christ,

Carissima Madre writes telling me that you are afraid of being sent away because of your ailments. So I am writing this to console you. You must know that both the Superior and I are even more kindly inclined towards you now that you are unwell, and that therefore we have not the slightest intention of abandoning you. Physical ailments are a gift from the Lord with which he wants to purify you, make you holy, and in a word make you entirely his. This is why he has allowed your present sufferings, which have come upon you without any fault of your own. So take courage and resign yourself: learn to despise the body and esteem the soul; learn to wish for heavenly goods through the experience of your present earthly ills.

Tell Carissima Madre that I have just received her letter of the 5th, and that she is to make use of the remedy without delay - and this, if it is God's good pleasure, will be effective. Yes, let her do this *at once*, and let me know day by day what results follow. She is to follow the written instructions of the doctor; and everything is to be done with prudence and in accordance with the spirit of God, for the benefit of the body, but even more of the soul. May Jesus your Spouse bless you.

ROSMINI p.

24. To Filippo Bunburg at Prior Park

Stresa, 21 August 1841

My dear Sir,

I am very pleased to hear that you are determined to love *truth*, whatever the cost, and never to betray it. I am sure that this is the best disposition you could possibly have if you are to obtain from God the light and the strength which you will need in your present situation, which you describe in your letter. I need not tell you that our obligations towards the *truth* are manifold, since we not only have to love its beauty as our intellect reveals it to us ('to acknowledge the truth') but also to show in practice by our conduct the good which it puts before our will ('to act according to the truth'). This second duty is much harder than the first; and to carry it out we have particular need of God's help, and to obtain this we must constantly ask for it. 'If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given to you', as St James says. So I am sure that you will be very happy if in all your travels you have God present before you and invoke him without ceasing, carrying out the duties given you by the holy Catholic Church, and making use, with lively faith 'and no hesitation' of her sacraments.

It will also be a great help and a defence against dangers if you make a practice of not esteeming things and even knowledge itself except in relation to truth and justice, and so to God and the Church to which you have the privilege of belonging. If you continue to work with this upright intention you will not simply be content to acquire more knowledge, but will little by little reflect over what use you can make of your knowledge, and esteem most highly whatever you will one day be able to use to advance the cause of religion, justice and mankind generally. And such reflections will greatly help you to consider as mere *vanities* the things of this world over which people grow so passionate; and they will also protect you from the many prejudices and false views with which both individuals and societies are commonly imbued.

ROSMINI p.

25. To Don Paolo Bertolozzi at Lucca

Stresa, 24 August 1841

Your letter tells me that you have read my *Treatise on Conscience* and some other works of mine, and have formed a favourable opinion of them. May God be blessed: it was for his sake that I wrote, and because it is simply his gift if I have not spread any errors. Of myself what could I expect to produce if not blunders, and great ones at that? So if, convinced of this, I have dared to print so many books, this was only because I trusted that God, whom I have always invoked, would help and guide me. And I cherish a fond hope that in his great mercy he has done this. 'This is my hope, laid up in my bosom.'

Goodbye for now. Remember before the altar -

Yours affectionately,
R.

26. To Count Mellerio in Milan

Stresa, 27 August 1841

My dear friend,

Your welcome letter of the day before yesterday is a fresh and valued sign of the true Christian friendship you have for me. I can assure you that in my *Reply to Eusebio Cristiano* I followed your advice and moderated some expressions that were rather harsh - though I gather you still feel that the tone was too bitter. And I should have taken the same view if I had written in that fashion, as you believe, *because my opponent first offended against me and wounded me in my most vulnerable spot, which is the integrity of my faith.* But I strongly maintain that for me that motive has no relevance, since (thank God) I take no account of personal slights, and never have done. Hence if I had not feared the lamentable consequences for works undertaken for the glory of God and for the true teaching of our Lord, you may be sure that I would not have said a word in reply to Eusebio. No, I repeat, I never have written (thank God) out of any spirit of revenge.

So why do I write? I write for the sake of the common good; and the moment I believe this is my duty, I consider I must write in a way that can most speedily and effectively bring about the good I have in view. To arrive at this one must never lie - God protect me from such a thing. But it is necessary to tell as much of the truth as seems necessary to realize my aim most fully. Sometimes this truth is a bitter pill; but then the medicines that the doctor gives us can be bitter; and I believe that the way I adopted is a way of doing good to my opponent. It is the way used by our Lord and all the saints, as their example shows. As long as you consider that the matter in dispute is something personal to me, it may be that you will accuse me of lacking meekness. But if you consider that it is God's cause that is in question, you will see that at times it really is true charity and meekness to speak out strongly. Our divine Master was no less meek, no less humble, when he called Herod a *fox*, or the Pharisees *blind hypocrites*, than when he prayed for those who crucified him. There is only one good which one must always aim at, and that is *charity* towards one's opponents, even one's enemies. But there are many ways of showing charity: and sometimes it means that one has to call the *blind* blind, and the *fox* fox. And this, unfortunately, is my case, it seems to me.

I had no other end in view but that of shaking up my adversaries so that they may understand that I am determined to oppose vigorously and uncover all the plots that they are continually being hatched against the Institute, and which I have to drag out from darkness into the light of day. I believe that in the present situation I am obliged to take a stand against them - even for their own good. I know that I shall not achieve anything, and that the deceitful, underhand persecutions will continue. But my enemies will at least realize that they will be hard put to carry out successfully their designs.

You and I agree that we have to do what is most in accord with the spirit of our divine Master - who could doubt it? Anything else could only be folly and deceit. But I have never meant to depart from his standard, and I would rather die than do so knowingly. Continue to pray to the Lord that he may enlighten me if I am mistaken, and that he will never let me be guided by any spirit but his own, which alone I desire and love.

Yours affectionately in Christ,
R.

27. To Count Mellerio in Milan

Verona, 7 September 1841

My dear friend,

We safely arrived yesterday evening here at this seminary, where the good priests welcomed us cordially as usual. But I am not writing simply to tell you about our journey, but rather to make some reply to your letter of the 1st, since on my way from Milan I was unable to write to you with the necessary freedom. Yet if I said nothing at all in reply it would seem as if I did not welcome your friendly admonition, or did not esteem it as in fact I do. So I will speak quite candidly now, as I usually do, and as you would certainly want me to.

So first, I must say that the feeling you express so assuredly strikes fear into me, and makes me wonder whether I did not perhaps go to excess in using reproachful and humiliating expressions towards my opponent. I hope your advice will at any rate stand me in good stead for the future, even if it is too late to make use of it in the present matter. But though it is true that I erred, and you condemn me for that, I have no intention of defending myself, knowing full well as I do that I am capable of all sorts of evil unless God supports me. But I think I should be guilty of a false humility and failing in both truthfulness and friendship if I did not frankly add that the reasons you give in your letter are not as sound as you imagine; and you too will see this if I put to you the following reflections.

You say you cannot see how *insults* aimed at one's neighbour can possibly make for the glory of God; and you are quite right. I could not conceive of this either; because insults are sins, and sins can never give glory to God. But are strong and humiliating words always insults? Certainly not. An *insult* implies injustice. Yet terms of blame are not insults if they voice the truth. For instance it is not an insult to call a thief '*thief*' - which is why Jesus Christ was not being insulting when he called the merchants in the temple *thieves*.

You then say that our divine Master could use strong words (as he did) because he was God, to whom alone belongs the right to say 'vengeance is mine'; but that we cannot do the like because we are merely men and cannot see into the depths of the heart. Yet if you think carefully about it you will see that no one could say that our Lord in his first coming ever acted out of a spirit of vengeance: revenge (or rather just retribution) is reserved for his Second Coming. He acted always out of *charity*, and so as to set us an example of this; and he never offended against the virtue of meekness even when he used such terms as *foolish*, *slow of heart*, *blind*, *thieves*, *fox* etc., or called the whole generation of his contemporaries *wicked*, called Peter *Satan*, and so on. All these things were said without being insulting, without any spirit of revenge, and without detriment to his divine meekness. All this was to teach us that it is sometimes necessary to use stern and even harsh words *out of love*; for we are to act so when this is the way to do good to our neighbour, to the one we are addressing. But to exercise this kind of charity it is certainly necessary to be quite without human passion or illusion. Stern, reproachful, humiliating words are not at all inconsistent with love and meekness. But they must not proceed from human passions or the deceits these can cause.

You next cite the example of St Paul, who when he was cursed replied with a blessing. No one can doubt that this is a duty for any man of God, any disciple of the Lord. But may he not both bless the person who curses him yet at the same time speak to him forcefully and use strong language? Being civil does not consist in the nature of the words used but in the spirit behind them. I am sure you can recall how St Paul had occasion more than once to imitate Christ by using harsh words towards his enemies - or rather the enemies of the glory of God. You know how, faced with the wonder-worker Elymas, he called him nothing less than 'son of the devil', 'enemy of all righteousness', 'full of all deceit and villainy'. And in this he followed the example of Polycarp who, when he met a heretic in Rome called him 'first-born of the devil' and 'enemy of all justice'. Nor can we say that Paul's conduct was sinful; for this would be a rash

judgement, belied by God himself, who confirmed St Paul's action by working a miracle. (Acts 13).

Think too about another occasion, described in Acts 23. When St Paul ingenuously said that he had acted *with a good conscience*, Ananias judged him rashly and gave him a blow; and then St Paul did not hesitate to call him *a whitewashed wall*. In this case he cannot be said to have sinned against charity either, but rather to have imitated our Lord in an act of zeal for the truth: he used harsh words to state the truth because he believed that this was necessary to attain a good end.

It is true that in the lives of the saints we see more instances of gentleness than of severity; but this only means that the times when severity may be necessary are fewer. Certainly in all that is to do with our purely personal concerns, meekness and gentleness must be found. But when it comes to matters of justice, of virtue, of Catholic truth, and of the good of our neighbour, at times sternness is called for. But there is nothing bitter about this, because it does not come from a hard heart, but rather from one that is loving and meek - whatever men may think.

So the instances of apparent harshness that are to be found in the words and writings of the saints, beginning with St John the Baptist, who called the Jews *a brood of vipers*, cannot be summarily judged as blameworthy. Rather they are to be attributed to their zeal and to the fulfilling of that precept of the Holy Spirit: *Answer the fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes*; and this precept must sometimes be obeyed, unless we consider the Holy Spirit to have spoken to no purpose.

All the same, these considerations will not excuse me if I have gone to excess in what I have written; and I say again that I am not trying to vindicate myself, and that if the arguments you put forward do not altogether convince me, I am certainly concerned about the impression my pamphlet made on you - even though it may be that your reaction came of not knowing fully the circumstances of the case, and the nature of the evil we have to face. At any rate, given the doubts you have raised in my mind, I will profit from your advice on future occasions; please bear with me, so that I may achieve my one desire, which is to know our Lord in all sincerity, and to imitate him as fully as possible. Pray too that this retreat may be blessed by God.

Your friend in Christ,
R. p.

28. To Count Mellerio in Milan

Verona, 13 September 1841

My dear friend,

You may be sure that I feel no rancour towards anyone, but I believe that *Truth* and *our holy religion* are one. So if any sort of fraud or deceit is exposed, this makes for the good of religion. Our God is the God of truth, and our Lord is Truth in person. But sad to say, in the world truth is little loved, and so God is little loved. Rather, instead of paying him honour, people form parties, factions; and they substitute appearances for substance. But no: if we love God, let us love him in simplicity and without any human divisions into opposing camps. It is a deplorable error to think that these can benefit religion - one that has caused great harm in the Church. I think you will agree with me over this, for I am sure that you are one of those who adore God in spirit and in truth

I embrace you in the lively hope that you will take these frank words of mine in their proper sense and will not misinterpret them. Goodbye in the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Yours affectionately,
A. R.

29. To Don Emilio Belisy at Prior Park

Rovereto, 28 September 1841

My dear brother in the Lord,

I hear that you and Fr Vice-Provincial are upset over a letter written to you there from Rome by a certain Father Carroll, a letter which makes out that the Holy See will shortly prohibit my *Treatise on Conscience*. I am distressed more than anything else over your concern; and to console you I am writing this letter, which I should like you to show to dear Pagani.

I declare to you, then, that if I had had the misfortune to put forward, in my *Treatise* or in other works, propositions that might merit censure by the Holy See, I should certainly have been ready, with God's help, to retract them and condemn them unreservedly, without any subtle arguments, as any true Christian should.

Secondly, I assure you that I do not think it likely that the Holy See is concerned at present to examine my book; or at any rate I certainly do not believe that any prohibition of it is imminent. What I do believe is that a faction inimical to the Institute is artfully spreading these rumours so as to cause us anxiety and spread distrust among people. This is a veritable persecution, the most crafty one that our enemy could conceive. A pamphlet is being distributed in cities all over Italy, accompanied by malicious rumours. Every day new ones are fabricated, only to be denied the following day. The most absurd reports follow one another without pause.

I have printed a reply to the infamous *libel* and I am posting a copy of it to you so that you can understand what is afoot. You will be able to tell from it whether it is likely that there are to be found in the *Treatise* condemned propositions; or at least if there are, they are not the ones that are denounced in this *libel*, which was printed with no indication of place of publication or date, and bears the fictitious name of Eusebio Cristiano. I have not heard of any other propositions that have come in for accusations; so I think this Father Carroll can only have written about what he has heard from this faction of enemies which unfortunately is opposed to us, and which resorts to this tactic of spreading rumours and false alarms.

We must fight this battle with peaceful charity, arming ourselves with prayer and faith. At the same time we have to oppose, tirelessly and with all our might, truth to falsehood, and light to darkness. So this is how things stand. Let us then pray and put our trust in the Lord. At the same time I ask you not to believe blindly all that people say, and not to upset yourself or grieve needlessly.

Yours affectionately in Christ,
A. R.

30. To Don G. B. Pagani in England

Rovereto, 11 October 1841

My dear brother in Christ,

Given that the members of the Institute 'live a retired life with intention of leaving this only as and when love of their neighbour requires this', it follows that it is in accord with the spirit of the Institute of Charity that the brethren at Prior Park should give up taking recreation among themselves in order to take it in common with others if and when charity calls for this. And charity in this connection means not only the good that

can be done to the students by conversing with them but also the fact that by so acting we can please the Bishop and other Superiors, and at the same time obviate any complaint.

Since the charity we show our neighbour must be an act of the love of God, the Superior must so arrange matters that there is no detriment to (a) the wish to love and serve God; (b) union with and obedience towards Superiors; (c) union and love among all the brethren. Only the existing circumstances can suggest how recreation in common can be combined with all these things. Perhaps the brethren could be divided into two groups, and each group take it in turn to join in the common recreation; or else each of you could take it in turn to go to the general recreation, while the rest remain together. Another way would be first to have a period of recreation with the students, followed by a short period among yourselves; or you could remain together while taking recreation in the same place as the others. And so on. In any case the important thing is to make sure that when you join the common recreation you all have the *intention* both of showing charity to your neighbour and of serving God, while at the same time you are denying your own inclinations. Before joining the recreation you should explicitly form these intentions, and pray to God for a favourable outcome.

You need also to give thought to the way you behave during the recreation. You must not show any displeasure over conversations on ordinary topics as long as there is nothing objectionable in them; rather take everything calmly and in good part, learning what you can and deriving profit from what is said. Make an effort to be agreeable and friendly, making pleasant conversation, not raising matters to do with religion unless these come up naturally - and even then, briefly, showing simplicity and deference towards those in the company. If ever it seems that the others ignore or do not care for what we have to say we have to take this patiently and not be discouraged, but try to make our conversation more interesting and our manner more pleasing. There is great scope here for showing both charity and mortification!

Lastly, it would be well to establish some definite acts of mutual charity and obedience, certain acts of submission, attachment and Christian affection to make up for any loss in the general recreation. It will be still more profitable for all to make interior acts of those virtues which may seem in greater danger. With the aid of these and similar expedients, I trust that the recreations shared with seculars will not be detrimental but may even be beneficial to us by making our virtue stronger and more manly, as is necessary if we are to achieve the great purpose of our Institute.

May the blessing and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

A. R.

31. To Don Paolo Bertolozzi at Lucca

Rovereto, 11 October 1841

My dear friend,

I have just received your letter of 29 September, and after reading the first part of what you have written in connection with my *Reply* [to Eusebio Cristiano], I am returning it to you, assuring you that while it seems to me written in a good and powerful style, at the same time it makes me blush. My dear friend, this is not a show of humility; but I am genuinely displeased by the excessive praise you give me. And this is for two cogent reasons: first, both truth and justice oblige me neither to pass over nor to approve of such praise, of which I find myself quite unworthy, and would not wish to receive here below even if I were worthy of it; and the second is that I fear it may arouse the resentment of my opponents, injuring their self-love. I would wish to soothe that

instead, and mitigate it; since what I have most at heart is charity and their own good. It would be quite wrong to go in for any kind of vendetta against them; rather what we must do is to ensure that it is truth that comes to the rescue of my reputation - in that if it were to suffer, that would harm my neighbour, and I think many people would be adversely affected.

So sympathize with me, my dear Paolo: the seeming reproach that I am directing at you does not alter the fact that I am vastly obliged to you for the generous friendship you show me. As soon as I receive the remainder of what you wrote I will read it and return it to you promptly. Have in mind when you are before the tabernacle -

Your ROSMINI

32. To Don Pietro Rigler at Trent

Rovereto, 14 October 1841

My dear brother in Jesus Christ,

I did not notice in you any lack of respect or harsh expressions during our conversation in Rovereto. I assure you that you did not offend me in any way and that I have no reproach for you over your manners. If we did not seem to be wholly in agreement, I think we did agree over essentials. I only wanted to bring out the goodness of God, who is pleased with those who wish to love him without limit and who make use of all the means of perfection he gives us by his counsels; I wanted to show the excellence of *a lively faith* in this divine goodness, by saying that this faith can never be mistaken. Anyone who looks to God for earthly things may not obtain them; but whoever hopes in him and urgently begs for justice, holiness, perfection can never fail to receive what he asks for through the merits of our Lord. For our God is a holy God, 'and holy is his name'; because our sanctification is his will - *this is the will of God, your sanctification*; because he has given us the model of perfection to imitate - *he who would follow me must deny himself etc.* So the hopes of whoever desires and asks for things of this kind can have no limits; and he has every reason to say: *for you, O Lord, have wonderfully established me in hope.* Hence I believe that no one can go wrong if he seeks after what is the more perfect thing, if he desires and prays for it and uses the means to achieve it.

So it is true, surely, that as I said, we are substantially in agreement, and both accept the rules laid down by the masters of the spiritual life concerning the discernment of vocation to the religious life. Accordingly, I receive into our little Institute all those who in my view show an upright intention and an unlimited resolve to seek perfection, because I know that Jesus Christ has said: 'I will not cast out anyone who comes to me'. Indeed I should have a scruple if I acted otherwise, because it seems to me that I would thereby show a lack of trust in God - as if he would fail to give the grace to become perfect. Rather, I know that his gifts never fail of their effect if on our part we cooperate with them. This does not mean that I expect those who are called to perfection to be already perfect: only that they hope to be so, ask this of God, and expect it of him.

The teaching outlined above is true in general; but I know well that at times God guides souls through particular lights that he grants them; and this may be the case with you. So I respect your resolutions, past and present; and I ask for you what I ask for myself: that the Lord may make you wholly his; that he may detach you from everything, and enlarge your heart so that you may embrace the whole world. In short that he may carry you to the height of perfection. I hope that of your charity you will do as much for me, and above all ask God that he will truly bring about my conversion once for all.

Your unworthy servant in Christ,
A. R.

33. To Don Paolo Barola in Rome

Stresa, 31 October 1841

. . . I have received a copy of the booklet against Dmowski¹, the publication of which I owe to your kind friendship and sincere love of truth. If only everyone loved the beauty of truth, how much more love of God there would be in the world, and how much less self-love! O beauty ever ancient and ever new, O eternal source of life and salvation!

Can we hope that those few words of my reply have done some good? And how about my reply to Eusebio? Tell me your frank opinion, and the views of those with whom you have discussed the matter. You may think that I expressed myself in rather strong terms; but I think this was justified, considering that we are dealing with completely anonymous people, and that my reply may have had the effect of dissuading others who might have contemplated imitating them. But I see that I have not entirely succeeded in this, because now another anonymous writer (if indeed it *is* another)² has gone into print to reproach me anew over the distinction I made between *sin* and *fault* - as usual without having at all understood my views! In the meanwhile let us pray for these people who needlessly become so heated. I certainly pray for my opponents daily, for this is what my Master commanded. I should like you to keep me informed of everything you come to learn about this miserable controversy - which undoubtedly God, who has allowed it to happen, will know how to turn to his greater glory.

I am immensely grateful to you, and to your sister also, for your kind hospitality towards Don Bernardo³. One is never mistaken in showing charity, my dear Don Paolo: our Lord will reward you for it. Continue to recommend me in your prayers to our Mother, Mary, and to St Alphonsus, of whom (whatever people may say) I have the honour to be a wretched, yes, but close and devoted admirer.

Your ROSMINI

(1) Concerning Dmowski, see *Vita di Antonio Rosmini*, vol. II, pp. 71 and 72.

(2) This new anonymous author is mentioned in *Vita di Antonio Rosmini*, vol. II, pp. 80 and 86.

(3) Don Bernardo Mazzi, who had gone to Rome for the sake of his health.

34. To Don Angelo Belmonte at Oneglia

Stresa, October 1841

Very Reverend Sir,

The particular aim of the Institute of Charity is none other than to use all the means that foster religious life, so as to carry out one's own duties with the greatest possible perfection according to the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ; and these duties in the last analysis amount to universal charity. So the duties of the members of the Institute are those of making every effort to attain and practise all the gospel virtues, and to carry out

¹ Concerning Dmowski, see *Vita di Antonio Rosmini*, vol. II, pp. 71 and 72

² This new anonymous author is mentioned in *Vita di Antonio Rosmini*, vol. II, pp. 80 and 86.

³ Don Bernardo Mazzi, who had gone to Rome for the sake of his health.

with complete indifference whatever works of charity are assigned to them by Superiors, and to do this wholeheartedly and with all their strength. Postulants who have no financial means but prove to have a vocation are received without any payment, except for the journey to the noviciate and the return journey if they are sent away. They must meet these expenses themselves. It is to be noted that no one can be received unless on examination he is shown either to have a sufficient knowledge of Latin, or to have some practical skill (since all the lay brothers must practise some craft or trade.) Any postulants who do have money have to pay for their keep out of their own resources during the noviciate; and if they are able to do so, they must bring a sum of money to be used for their maintenance or as a patrimony. But, to conclude, no one who has a true vocation is ever refused for temporal considerations.

I hope that this brief account will supply what you want. If you send to Stresa (where the noviciate is) any promising young men, they will certainly be well received, and carefully examined concerning their vocation. In the meantime, please accept my thanks for your zeal and kindly interest, and remember me before the Lord in your Mass.

Your humble and grateful servant,

A. ROSMINI, Provost-General of the Institute of Charity

35. To Don Luigi Gentili at Grace Dieu

Stresa, 3 November 1841

My dear brother in the Lord,

You did well to thank Mgr Walsh for the honour which he wished to do you in naming you Dean or Vicar Forane. But you know that each of us must firmly refuse such marks of honour by reason of the vow he has made (though if possible this reason should not be made the excuse for the refusal, and other good reasons should be put forward instead). Besides, I think that with such a burden on your shoulders, you would not be able to do more good to souls than you do at present. Rather, the peaceful course of your apostolate might be disturbed.

Your reflections on the controversy in which I am involved are very wise. I have to admit that my reply may seem somewhat harsh. In writing it, my aim was to make clear how absurd it was for a theologian to do battle against me armed with nothing more than ignorance and errors against the faith. For the libel written against me really does contain heretical views, and I have no doubt it will be put on the Index. At the same time I would not wish to bring about such a condemnation at present, because our opponent is very heated, and he makes use of unspeakable trickery and ruses in his attacks on us. My reply has already caused the scales to fall from the eyes of those who do not belong to the other side; while those do, limit themselves for the present to saying that I should not have made any response, that there was no need for this, and that my reply was too harsh. There may be grounds for this accusation: I have no wish to vindicate myself. But the Lord knows well that my intention was blameless, and that in writing the reply I truly believed that I was serving God's glory. If I have the opportunity, I will try to pour oil on the wounds into which I poured wine - but not, I trust, vinegar.

Give my fondest greetings to our dear brother Phillips, and my respects to all his family. May Jesus and his Spirit guide you, and the Mother of Uncreated Wisdom grant you wisdom according to your needs. I never cease to pray for my dear Don Luigi and for all our other dear brethren. Goodbye.

Yours in Christ,
A. ROSMINI p.

36. To Suor Maria Gioseffa Seydoux at Domodossola

Stresa, 29 November 1841

My dear daughter in Christ,

I believe that the postulant you spoke to me about in the name of the Superior is the one whose examination results I have received - results that were so poor that she cannot be accepted. You must be persuaded that there is a grave need to *choose* from among the postulants, and that you must admit only those who, in addition to much virtue and devotion, have some ability for study. For otherwise the Institute will be filled with useless people and will be able to do little good. Your idea of readily accepting applicants on a trial basis is a mistaken one: it is wrong to receive any young woman, only to dismiss her soon afterwards. Instead, only those are to be received who offer every probability or a moral certainty that they will turn out well. And in a matter so important, no notice should be taken of what people may say. If the Institute has capable subjects, you may be sure that people will speak highly of it; but if in order to avoid any criticism by people outside you take on subjects of little capacity, the final outcome will be that people will certainly speak ill of it. I should like you, then, to make a habit of thinking in broad terms, and looking to long-term consequences.

If this young woman has given up her post of her own accord, without being told by the Sisters to do so, the fault is hers. The Sisters cannot on this account admit an incapable sort of person: this would be a continuing burden, and would destroy good order, thereby obstructing the healthy development of the Institute. So I cannot permit you to accept that postulant, unless she has enough money to pay for her keep for two years, in which she could develop her abilities through study. And what I say in this letter I say not simply to you but to all Superiors, now and in the future. So I hope that the Central Superior and you her Vicaress will keep before your eyes what was laid down for Suor Giovanna Antonietti in the letter written to her on my instructions by Don Carlo Giliardi on 3 January last, and in the decrees preceding this.

Now to answer the latter part of your letter. What are you thinking of, my daughter? You say: 'I fear it is not the will of God that I should hold this office.' These words show that you have not yet learnt to recognize the true sign of the will of God - which is *obedience*. If your Superiors appoint you to an office, you must no longer fear that this is not the will of God; for this would be a lack of faith. You add that you can no longer be recollected and that you are overwhelmed by numerous distractions. My daughter, if you keep in mind the following solid principles, all your anxiety will disappear:

1. The duties carried out by a Superior or Vicaress benefit the whole community, and constitute most valuable acts of charity, worth far more than many private prayers;

2. The distractions that Superiors suffer, when these come of carrying out their duties, are themselves meritorious in God's eyes;

3. Superiors have to sanctify all that they do, first through the charity they exercise towards those for whose sake they work; and then through their love of God. This is because everything they do must be done for God, in order that he may be glorified, better known and loved, and that those for whose good they work may become holy.

4. The main prayer of Superiors, which they should make at all times, must be *to ask* help that they may carry out their duties well; *to offer* to the Lord all the labours, burdens, sufferings, annoyances that are inseparable from the position of Superior; and

to *humble* themselves interiorly before God who sends them these things, saying with St Paul; 'I can do all things in him who gives me strength.'

So banish your fears and lack of confidence (which amount to a slight against him), and do not be attached to exercises of piety when your *duties* force you to omit them. Act with that liberty of spirit so much recommended by St Francis of Sales. May our Lord Jesus Christ bless all those of you who serve him there. Goodbye.

Your father in Christ,
A. ROSMINI p.

37. To Don Antonio Missiaglia in Verona

Stresa, 11 December 1841

Reverend and dear Sir,

I was very pleased to have your letter, because it brought me news of you and told me about your holy and affectionate feelings. I am most grateful to you for the prayers you have offered, and will go on offering, for me during this octave of the feast of Mary Immaculate: ask her to convert me in heart to her and to her divine Son. As for the petty persecutions you mention, they can do no harm to anyone, but will rather produce good, much good. This has already begun to happen.

I and indeed all of us are praying for you, faced as you are by the need to come to a decision over so important a matter as your state of life. I am sure you will be consoled by recognizing what is the most holy will of God, and by fully carrying it out. This is our whole wish, the aim of what we do and what we wish to do: this is our good, and our delightful consolation. For truly there is no other real good or consolation apart from that most holy will. One thing we are certain of is that God wishes our sanctification and perfection; and this is because his will, being essentially holy, has as its proper object holiness in us men. It follows that if we aim at what is most holy and perfect with the generosity of soul which belongs to those who put all their trust in God, we can be sure that we are following that highest and most perfect will of our Creator. There is no possible room for error in this belief . . .

Your affectionate servant in the Lord
A. R.

38. To the cleric Gian Battista Paccanari in Trent

Stresa, 11 December 1841

My dear Sir,

You did well to write to me. I enclose the formula you want. And for the rest - courage! It is only natural that the tree does not fall at the first blow it receives; nor do we, when first we pray for it, obtain that grace which God grants only to faith, to perseverance, to fervent and untiring desire. Remember the saints, and especially St Aloysius. One of the principal means of obtaining the consent you want is to show that you are never hesitant, but decisive and resolute, whatever the cost; to ask and ask again, keeping before the eyes of your parents your reasons and your feelings - but particularly the grave liability they incur before God if they resist the divine will and call. Say that although you are free in this matter, and do not need their consent, you wish to have it, so as to show them your respect and affection. You can add that they must not doubt that as their son, even if you are at a distance, you will continue to love them greatly and will be grateful for the favour they will do you if they consent to your wish; and that therefore you will be more closely bound and obedient to them because they will make themselves the cause of your salvation and happiness, and so on.

For the rest, above all, pray; this is the most effective means you can use in the matter. Put everything in the hands of most holy MARY; have an unlimited devotion to her; and you will see how well this good Mother of yours will protect you and bring about a happy conclusion for her devoted son. In short, have no doubts: simply adopt all the means I have mentioned, with lively faith and perseverance.

As for the rules of life you ask for: first of all it is necessary that you resolve to conform yourself entirely to the little book of the *Maxims of Perfection*, of which I have let you have a copy. These maxims contain a great deal of substance.

In the second place, make it your resolve to be faithful every day to meditation, examination of conscience and some spiritual reading. Read also the lives of the saints, especially St Aloysius, St Stanislaus Kostka, St John Berchmans and St Ignatius.

Try to say your vocal prayers *perfectly* - that is, with intelligence and devotion, saying to God in your heart the same words that your lips pronounce.

Aim also at the greatest possible retirement and silence; be recollected in the presence of God, and keep up a constant converse with his divine majesty, with our Blessed Lady and all the angels and saints.

Have an upright intention in all that you do, always having in mind the glory of God - your own sanctification and perfection make for this. How greatly we gain when we act with an upright intention and do not look for anything human, but only and always and in all things God himself. Such uprightness of intention is a great help in becoming holy.

Finally, be sure to carry out well all the duties of your state, and *never to waste time*. Instead, spend every moment in prayer, study and good works.

There are the simple rules I prescribe for you: keep them, and you will be one of us very soon, I hope. Pray for -

Yours affectionately,
A. R.

39. To Suor Giovanna Antonietti at Domodossola

Stresa, 22 December 1841

My dear daughter in Christ,

Now that God has given you good health, you need to preserve it. So you must know that it is the will of your Superiors that you spend your time *directing* others (for this is the duty of a Superior), and not so much in *doing things*, for this is the duty of those under you. Again, a Superior must know how to make use of the service of others in carrying out her plans; for in this way she helps to train them and make them into mature women themselves. But if the Superior is intent on both directing and executing, she will exhaust herself needlessly, like Moses, who judged all the people on his own until Jethro advised him to choose the sixty senior men to help him. A Superior who tries both to direct and to act in everything herself will end up by doing neither well. Moreover she will not train her companions: they cannot learn if their Superior does not give them the chance to act themselves. Make it your care above all to look after the spiritual side of things, to exhort the Sisters to virtue, to show them how to overcome their defects, and in general to watch over the affairs of the whole house, being vigilant over observance and order. If you notice that something is lacking, get someone else to see to it.

In these ways you will, I hope, lessen the burden on yourself. For the rest, as regards your health, be open to what your assistants advise, and so practise obedience yourself.

May the infant Jesus enrich you with his precious gifts, as is his way with his loving Spouses. Goodbye.

Your father in Christ,
ROSMINI p.

40. To Suor M. Constanza Darioli at Trontano

Stresa 24 December 1841

My dear daughter in Christ,

I was very pleased to read in your letter the words: ‘The Trontano Sisters are the happiest people in the world, because they wish for nothing other than whatever is the will of our most loveable Jesus: with this we are always happy and contented.’ This indeed is the way you should behave in your present situation, being persuaded that you should receive every lack of regard you meet with, even any rudeness, with much greater pleasure than any endearments, praise or earthly reward. The mortifications that come your way as you carry out a holy ministry such as yours are received for Christ; and blessed are those who suffer something in the name of this most sublime and glorious Lord! Glory, then, in any afflictions you have to suffer; and be grateful to your Spouse who condescends to ask you in this way for a sign of your love. Have great respect for the minister of God who receives your confession, and be grateful to him for the trouble he takes in hearing you. If you act like this, God will greatly bless you and your work, and your soul will make much progress in virtue. This is the grace I ask for you from the infant Jesus.

Your father in Christ,
A. R. p.

41. To the novices of the Sisters of Providence at Domodossola

Stresa, Christmas Day 1841

My dear daughters,

Learn to appreciate the sublime vocation by which you are called to be of use to the world; remember what our divine master, Jesus, said to his disciples: ‘This is my commandment - that you love one another as I have loved you’ (Jn 15, 12).

Have a great and eager desire for perfection, but avoid any anxiety that could make you uneasy and disturb your peace of mind. Be mindful of those words of our Saviour: ‘Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid’ (Jn 14, 27).

Hate sin more than death; but should any one of you have the misfortune to fall, then she must repent and pick herself up without becoming discouraged, remembering the teaching of the Beloved Disciple of Jesus: ‘My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world’ (1 Jn 2, 1-2).

Do not believe that you will obtain pardon through much talk in confession, or from splitting hairs over the gravity or otherwise of your faults, or by making your confession to one priest rather than another. Rather, you will obtain it through true repentance and through lively faith in the authority to remit sins that Christ conferred on his ministers. Recall what the Lord Jesus said to the woman: ‘Take heart, daughter: your faith has made you well’ (Mt 9, 22). And so, be equally content whatever confessor is assigned to you by the Superior.

Have a great love for correction, and receive it with a grateful heart and a serene expression. Again, remember what our divine Master said: 'Whoever is from God hears the words of God' (Jn 8, 47).

Study to become very proficient in everything you are taught; but if anyone, having done the best she could, does not succeed as well as she wished, she must be resigned over this without becoming upset; and in any case go ahead as well as possible, omitting nothing by way of diligence, effort and perseverance in order to learn. Remember what the Master said to the servant who hid the one talent in the ground: 'You wicked and lazy slave! you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest' (Mt 25, 26, 27).

Among the things you are told to do, do not be fond of one rather than another, but put all your *pleasure* in your *duty*. Then you will exert yourself with equal enthusiasm in everything that God asks of you, and it will not happen that when something goes against the grain with you it is neglected. In this matter too, imitate our divine Master Jesus, who said: 'I have come down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me' (Jn 6, 38).

Have a fear of the imagination, and do not give a hearing to its empty and disturbing judgement of things. Instead, walk always in the light of understanding. Jesus said: 'I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness' (Jn 12, 46).

Do not be put out by anything that happens contrary to your will. If you remain undisturbed it will be a sign that you love God and are ruled by his Providence, which disposes all things and keeps watch continually over you - as we are reminded by those words of Christ: 'All the hairs of your head are numbered' (Mt 10, 30).

Prefer what obedience prescribes for you to any thoughts or judgements of your own; for the will of God is found in obedience, according to the words of our divine master: 'Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me' (Lk 10, 16).

Your affectionate father in Christ,
A. R.

(These reminders are a real jewel, and Rosmini wanted them to be framed and put up in the work-room of the novices so that they would have them always before their eyes, read them, ponder on them, and have them explained to them in conferences.

42. To the Sister of Providence Teresa Notaris at Domodossola

Stresa, 29 December 1841

My dear daughter in Christ,

Love your fellow-religious and companions in the school of the divine Master; take pleasure in their spiritual progress, their virtues and knowledge, with no trace of envy; and wish to imitate them in good, trusting in God. What an ugly thing is *jealousy*! And how very far it should be from the heart of a Sister of Providence - which should overflow with love for her neighbour, and imitate the humility of the heart of Jesus. I urge you then to overcome yourself, and fight against all your spiritual enemies with courage, putting your trust in God's grace, which you must ask for unceasingly. In this way you will attain your holy aim. Goodbye.

Your father in Christ,
A. ROSMINI p.

43. To the Sister of Providence Maria Crocifissa at Domodossola

Stresa, 29 December 1841

My dear daughter in Christ,

When teaching in school you need to have a dignified and firm air with the girls. You have to be strict even in small things and never relax your vigilance. The secret of keeping the pupils quiet lies in your authoritativeness and in treating quite severely the very first breaches of silence, the first sign of fidgeting or frivolity. Punishments may need to be given from time to time, and you will not be wrong to impose them. But you will save yourself a good deal of trouble if you impose yourself with a serious and dignified air. You need to be kind-hearted, yes, but not to be indulgent or to connive at bad behaviour

For the rest, you will learn all this a little at a time as you gain experience. Have no fears: you will become a fine teacher, with the help of study and patience. And do not be alarmed at temptations; they will only serve to make you more holy if you put your trust in God. They will humble you; and what a great good it is for us to be humbled and to feel the need we have to pray and beseech God! So too you must not worry about the other things you mention. God will provide. Serve him with a generous and willing heart. Pray for me, and get your companions to do the same.

Your father in Christ,
ROSMINI p.

44. To Don Giuseppe Gagliardi at Domodossola

Stresa, 31 December 1841

My dear brother in Christ. May the Lord be thanked for everything. Amen.

I hope that on such occasions as conferences, manifestation of conscience and hearing confessions, you make sure of instilling those gospel virtues which are the foundation of our Institute, dwelling on first one, then another, and bringing out their intrinsic worth and value. Speak always as a loving father and a caring pastor; and especially bear in mind these rules: first, your normal way of speaking must not smack of severity or blame, but rather be *instructive*; or even at times amount to a simple opening of your heart. The sort of formation which comes of a word here, a short and friendly piece of advice there, given at the right moment - these are things that can be very helpful. It should be like a continuous gentle shower of holy teachings, backed up by strong and appealing reasons. Secondly, at times simply give advice, with no sign of disapproval; because positive advice and suggestions over behaviour very often do more good than reproof. Third, do not pass over any defects, but aim to root them out rather than cover them up; and you will succeed in this with patience and the diligent efforts the Lord will suggest to you. Lastly, when you do give reproofs, and sometimes you have to do this forcefully (but without any harshness), act like the surgeon who after making the necessary incision, puts a dressing on the wound and bandages it up so that it may heal. And so you, after you have given a stern reprimand, follow it with a sign of affection, and always end on a loving note. After you have dismissed the brother, find a way of speaking to him again, either by recalling him or by going yourself to see him for some other reason. Then talk to him calmly and serenely, in a friendly fashion, so that he will

conclude that it was only charity that led you to act as you did. Goodbye. May the Child Jesus fill you with consolation and his holy courage.

Your brother in Christ,
A. ROSMINI p.

45. To Don Clemente Alvazzi at Domodossola

Stresa, 1 January 1842

My dear brother in Christ, may the grace of our Lord circumcise our hearts, now and always. Amen.

You did well to write to me frankly and from your heart (something pleasing in God's sight); but another time do so sooner, just as soon as the trouble begins. How very precious are our rules for those who love them with all their heart and observe them faithfully! And how useful for obtaining peace of heart and for overcoming the deceits of the enemy are nos. 31 and 32 of the Common Rules and no. 41 of the Memorial of the First Probation. In my view it would be impossible for anyone to be lost if he kept such rules with complete fidelity and in the right spirit. I beg you most earnestly to write them in your heart. You know very well the means the enemy uses to gain entry to your soul: he always works on the *imagination*. You must always fear this, and treat it as your greatest enemy. When it is allowed to give scope to the malice of the devil (who knows only too well how to work on it), it produces nothing but lies, treachery and wickedness. Always do the opposite of what it tells you - this, my dear brother, is a sure rule to lead you to holiness. It is true that this costs great effort; but strong action is needed if we are to attain the kingdom of heaven. You have to use violence against yourself in order to overcome those who resort to violence.

Again, this violence is indispensable if we are to imitate our Lord Jesus Christ, who suffered so much violence; and this applies first with regard to self-love. We need to be profoundly convinced that 'the greatest possible good is the mortification of our self-love'. It is absolutely necessary that this important principle, which expresses the whole essence of the gospel of Jesus Christ, should penetrate to our very depths, and not remain merely on the surface. So to produce such a disposition we have to make use of every available means: meditation, prayer, beseeching God, humbling ourselves, asking our Superiors for humiliations, and above all begging them to touch us to the quick. It is in this that our salvation lies: in wanting this *living thing* [this love of self] to be killed by continual pain and torment. Oh, my dear brother, make it your great and salutary resolution to achieve this in the new year; and then you will find yourself happier every day, and you will understand what is the spirit of the Institute to which God has called you - a spirit of profound humility and self-abasement, hidden in the wounds of Jesus Christ.

There is another thing you must do: write to Father Rector, our dear Don Setti, open your heart to him with regard to the deep wound you say you have in your heart because he has sometimes contradicted you and hurt you very much. Ask him to forgive you from his heart, so that you will be obliged henceforth to love him greatly, as is only right, and let there remain no regrets about the past. We have to love one another, all of us, with a tender, constant and holy love. And how much more must we love the Superiors who use all care and solicitude for the sake of our well-being. If you still feel any resentment, let it be replaced by immense gratitude and a desire that Superiors should continue to fight against that *living part* of us that needs to be *mortified* for the sake of Jesus Christ, so that with him we may rise to *true life*. And you will join your own strenuous efforts to wage this war with those of Superiors.

What a fantastic picture you are inventing when you speak of your fear that you were deceived when the time came for you to bind yourself by taking your vows. I assure you that rather than compelling anyone to remain in the Institute I would prefer that the Institute itself should be destroyed. Since it should be all sincerity, fidelity, charity, how could it allow itself to have a serpent within its bosom? And such would be any who, lacking any vocation, had been drawn in by human means. But this is not the case with you, my dear man. This is another example of the devil making use of imagination for his own ends. For the rest, I am not satisfied with your idea of destroying the devil's snare by opposing him with indirect reasonings. You need to arm yourself with stronger shields and armour and take up more effective means. The sort of thoughts that can disperse all the dark clouds from your mind (as the sun banishes the darkness of night) are: the beauty of serving God in all things; the profit that comes of being humbled; the merit of obeying God's will entirely; the great joy of loving God and being loved by him, as well as by the many virtuous souls who are your companions, as we all obey the Lord's beautiful commandment of love; the glory of being able to follow this Saviour of ours to Calvary, treading in his bloodstained footsteps and drinking from his chalice

Have no doubts, my dear brother, that you will win the victory and become a true son of the Institute - I mean *a saint*. But since the enemy never sleeps, nor must you. Write to me again if you still suffer temptations; but do everything you can to overcome them. The letter which you will write to Fr Rector will serve as your penance. Also, read the *Constitutions* and meditate on them so as to understand their spirit; and for this you need to mix your reading with *prayer*. May the loveable Jesus who today begins to shed his blood for love of us enlighten you, strengthen you, and shower on you all his gifts. Goodbye.

Your brother in Christ,
A. ROSMINI p.

46. To Don Paolo G. Bertolozzi, Canon of Lucca

Stresa, 3 January 1842

My dear friend,

The Institute of Charity has two main classes of members: the *religious* and the *ascribed*.

The religious are those who consecrate themselves entirely to God with the three vows; and some of them, who are chosen by Superiors, take a fourth vow of [obedience to] missions given by the Pope. All the religious are entirely dependent on obedience to Superiors, and declare themselves ready to exercise whatever branch of charity is assigned to them.

The ascribed have no obligations binding in conscience; they form a Society of Christian friends with the aim of helping their neighbour in any and all works of charity, and of coming to the aid of their religious brethren. From time to time they gather under a religious Prefect, or in his absence a Vice-Prefect, simply to discuss together what good works they can do for their neighbour.

If a number of the ascribed wish to combine to carry out a particular good work, they have recourse to the Fr General, who will give them some special rules, if he decides that what they propose is a holy and prudent idea. They then form a Sodality of ascribed. The most desirable form of sodality, where this can be set up, is the Oratory; because it would be useful if the Society had such a place where the members could

unite for certain pious exercises, using a conveniently placed house, or at least a room set aside for their meetings.

From what little I have said you will be able to see, if you reflect about it and consider all the possible results of such an institution, how many advantages could come of this pious union dedicated to universal charity. As I said, the ascribed member has no obligations in conscience; he simply does what his own fervour and zeal suggest to him. He freely fosters as far as he can such good works as are suggested to him by friends. He is free to leave the Society at any time, provided he gives notice to the Prefect or the Superior of the Institute.

Read the little book entitled *Maxims of Perfection*, which you will find in the volume of my Ascetical Works. It contains all the principles.

Let us love each other in the Lord, in whom I have the honour to be -

Your affectionate friend,
R.

47. To Suor Giovanna Antonietti at Domodossola

Stresa, 11 January 1842

My dear daughter in Christ,

Yesterday evening Sister Torriera came here, and when I saw her crying and in a poor state of health, I really felt sorry for her. I cannot approve of your having sent her away and exposed her to so long a journey in this cold season. Where is your charity, my daughter? It is true that I did not order you to keep her but only advised this, leaving everything to your prudence. But I hope that you are all not only very obedient but also very charitable. Illness is not a fault for which to blame someone who loves the Lord and is certainly loved by him. So why did you refuse an occasion of gaining merit and carrying a cross given to you by the Lord, by keeping and caring for a sick woman who was so anxious to live and die in God's house? And if it should happen that a journey undertaken in such bitter weather should shorten her days, who should grieve over this? I repeat that I certainly cannot approve of what you did.

Moreover this Sister came to you without my consent: it was one of the things done in my absence; and for this reason also you would have done better to carry the burden resulting from some mismanagement. Let us hope that another time you will know better what charity requires in deciding over such situations.

As regards the Institute of Charity, I make it a rule never to dismiss anyone simply for health reasons. All the members are dear to me, even if they are infirm. If however anyone, besides suffering from ill health, is also lacking in the necessary degree of virtue, then I have no difficulty in sending him away.

God bless you. Do not write to me again about this matter. Let it all be considered over.

Your father in Christ,
R. p.

48. To the cleric Arnaldo Fehr at Domodossola

Stresa, 12 January 1842

My dear brother in Christ,

Your reasoning was very mistaken when you argued that the Vice-Rector, who is at present the Superior of that house, did not have the faculty to change the orders of the Rector in his absence. Since he takes the place of the Rector there, he can change them in any way that God inspires him to consider best, just as any Superior can alter his own orders when he considers this necessary. And even if it were true (as it is not) that the Vice-Rector could not of his own accord change the orders of the absent Rector, are you sure that any change he did make was not agreed beforehand with the Rector himself or some higher Superior? And is it then the place of a subject to sit in judgement on what is done by his own Superiors? My dear Arnaldo, where is your genuine obedience in all this - the obedience which is the highest virtue, containing true supernatural wisdom? Would you have made the same presumptuous judgement if the new order given by the new Superior had happened to be to your liking? Examine yourself carefully, and see whether your evident lack of the golden indifference and self-denial which should be shown by the disciples of Jesus was perhaps what darkened your mind to the point where you passed a judgement on the one whom you should consider to be *your* judge and your dear guide to the divine will.

I have to say the same of all that you tell me in your letter about the resentment you felt over not being listened to as you wished, and being interrupted by your Superior. Do you not yet know to what height of perfection you have been called by God? Are you not yet aware of the nature of the school of our Lord Jesus Christ in which you find yourself? Do you not understand the deep meaning of those words: *If anyone wishes to follow me he must deny himself*? Ah! pray, pray that the good Jesus will give you an interior understanding of his profound teaching, which is all about self-abnegation, humility and the value of suffering. This is a doctrine that certainly cannot be learned by reading thousands of books, but can only be acquired at the foot of the cross. What amazes me, when I read the strong expressions and all too human reasoning your letter contains, is that you have not yet grasped that Superiors are obliged to exercise their subjects in humility, mortification, patience and the denial of all self-will; and that you have not yet come to understand what an infinite treasure of divine wisdom is contained in this divine virtue. There can be no doubt that, if you did understand the value of this treasure, you would seek it day and night and seize eagerly every opportunity of humiliation. Rather than being annoyed if a Superior, who was heavily burdened with his responsibilities, could not calmly listen to you as you would wish, you would rather be grateful, thank him, and beg him not to spare your self-love but instead to humble you in every way and so mortify you. For a soul who loves Jesus Christ and wishes to imitate him as closely as possible, rebuffs and mortifications are blessings to be thankful for. Blessed are you, my dear Arnaldo, if you obtain from the Lord the grace of such enlightenment

Do you really think that someone who aspires to serve God, a religious consecrated to him, but who is not capable of accepting it calmly and even joyfully if he is interrupted and not listened to by his Superior can ever make himself a worthy minister in the works of God? What will you do - if you are now so easily put out - when it is a matter of being exposed to insults and hardships among pagan nations, should you be sent to proclaim the gospel among them? Do you really think you could stand up to severe trials in distant lands when you cannot bear a cross word or a little rough treatment from your own Superiors? What great presumption, what deplorable blindness you show! For your own sake, learn from this unhappy experience how much there is yet in need of reform within you, how much need to put off the old man.

Humility, humility - in this is to be found the truly sublime wisdom! Abasement of self, esteem and respect for everyone, obedience that is prompt, joyful, indifferent and universal: these are the things I expect you to make your principal study. This is the real wisdom of the Institute to which God has deigned to call you; an Institute that professes

to know nothing but JESUS CHRIST CRUCIFIED. You can be sure that nothing else in you will make me happy except to see you become like Christ - who was *obedient to death, even death on a cross*. Do not scrutinize the commands of Superiors, but carry them out faithfully, readily and joyfully.

I can see that to arrive at such a disposition you need to put *study* in the second place among your likings; and the first place must be given to that virtue which includes all the others (and therefore all moral good) - perfect and mortified obedience. This must hold the first place in your heart; and you must reckon it *a great gain* when through it you have been led to leave aside study and everything else. Remember the great saying of the enlightened St Francis of Assisi: 'We know as much as we carry out'

I am not giving you a penance, because your letters give me to fear that you do not feel compunction over your fault. May Jesus bless you.

Yours,
A. R.

Stresa, 19 January 1842

My dear brother in Christ,

Yes, my dear son in Christ, give a welcome to the light of grace, which speaks to our hearts only of the indescribable good which consists of always humbling ourselves. And the only genuine humility is that which issues in action. What action? In the sublime action of BLIND OBEDIENCE. This is only brought about in us by Christ's life-giving words. Therefore blessed are those who have let his saying: *If anyone wishes to follow me, he must deny himself* penetrate to their very marrow! 'Those who have been humbled will rejoice'.

I see from your letter, which cheered me, that the Lord *stands at the door and knocks*. I hope that you have opened it, and will always do so. I am sure that if you seek truth and justice, as I greatly hope you do, you will find both through the humbling of your heart; for this is where they dwell, and elsewhere you will find only a travesty of them. And you must not only, out of love for truth and justice, make a habit of putting aside any reasonings of your own which favour your natural inclinations and are opposed to obedience; you must also sacrifice to obedience to God and love of penance and mortification *all* the motives and rights that you think you have by nature - purely for the love of God and out of zeal to be like Christ, your dear Master and Saviour.

I was very pleased to know that you promise me to be *indifferent* to everything, even to not studying, if God through your Superiors requires this of you. Perfection and uprightness of soul do truly call on you to be ready to make even this sacrifice to God. And you will be able to do all this by means of the grace which will give you strength. But remember to direct your prayers always to asking for justice and the grace to overcome yourself interiorly. So now, since I think you are well disposed, I will give you the penance you ask for. It is that you are to read and meditate deeply on the first four rules of chapter X of the Common Rules, so that you may learn to savour their beauty, write them in your heart, and ask Jesus Christ to engrave them there himself.

Goodbye, my dear brother. I bless you and embrace you in the Lord.

Your father in Christ,
R.

50. To Count Giacomo Mellerio in Milan

Stresa, 19 January 1842

My dear friend,

I am writing simply to let you know that it pleased the Lord to take to himself my mother on the 15th of this month, at six in the morning, and in her 85th year. It is my hope that, given her goodness of soul, she was able at that early hour to say to the Lord, *O God, my God, I watch for you at dawn*. At all events, not even her piety, the sacraments she received many times, and the resignation and love of God she showed most evidently in her last moments, can guarantee for us that she has no need of our prayers. So I recommend her warmly to yours, for the sake of the love we share and the friendship you profess for this orphan, and especially in view of the fact that as an ascribed member of the Institute of Charity (to which she found it a great consolation to belong) she was our sister in the Lord.

Make known this news, which I would not dare to call sad, for my faith rather tells me that it is happy, to your sister and our friends, so that they may all unite their prayers for her to ours. The departed one, whether she is already receiving heavenly consolation or (as I hope) is destined for this, will repay them with her prayers, since the holy souls never forget the spiritual alms they receive from those of us who are still *in via* [on our pilgrim way]. Goodbye in the heart of Jesus.

Yours affectionately,
A. R.

51. To Giuseppe Rosmini at Rovereto

Stresa, 19 January 1842

My dear brother,

I assure you that when the news reached me that we were deprived of our mother on this earth, my thoughts went to you. And my distress was all the greater when I saw the news as a fresh affliction for a soul already suffering, as I knew yours was.

For the rest, console yourself with the same reasonings with which I console myself - the main one being that we are here in this life to suffer, and so to win eternal glory. God when he distributes things good and bad, knows what we need to make us more holy. If he sends us sufferings, it is because he sees that through them we shall more easily reach the holiness and glory to which in his mercy he is calling us. Be sure to make use of any other comfort to raise your spirits.

It occurs to me that should you wish to spend a few days here, I have a comfortable room to offer you; and the change of scene would perhaps benefit you. In any event, it is important that we should comfort ourselves in any way possible; and first of all by asking God himself to give us the strength to find consolation. For our God is the God of all consolation; and to be consoled in him is something that his grace infuses in our hearts. . . In short, help yourself in every way to have good hopes for the future, and particularly through *faith* and *prayer*. Goodbye.

Your affectionate brother,
ANTONIO

52. To Count Antonio Fedrigotti at Rovereto

Stresa, 21 January 1842

My dear cousin and friend,

Thank you for your letter, in which you gave me direct news of the passage from this life of your mother, my dear cousin, Giovanna. Although I had already heard from home the sad news, and had prayed for her soul, as was only right, still it is good that relatives and friends should share with one another both the important troubles and the joys that life brings. I am truly with you in your sorrow, as you are with me in mine - since we have both been orphaned at almost the same time. It seems that our lives, which began at the same time, are following a similar course. Our consolations, as you say in your letter, should be common to both of us: not so much the human considerations, such as the advanced age of her who has left this life, as well as the inevitability of death itself; but even more the consolations offered us by our holy religion. To the eyes of faith this brings before us on the one hand the boundless mercy of God, and on the other, the excellence of both the life and the death of our two dear departed ones. We remember their resignation to God's will, the peacefulness of their last moments, and the devotion with which they received the last sacraments. So that we can and must, with good reason, hope that as they shared the same name while on earth they will also have in common the name of the Lamb written on their foreheads in heaven. There they will pray for us, my dear cousin; and there they will await their sons. This furnishes a further reason for us to detach our hearts from the things of earth and place all our treasure in heaven. Both your family and mine have, in the space of a few years, seen the passage of not a few relatives of ours from this passing life to an eternal one!

Do please give my condolences to your brothers and your sister-in-law. They are all so good that even in their grief they will, I am sure, have enjoyed the support and consolations of faith. Given my circumstances, I shall have to make a short visit home. There we shall be able to talk together at greater length.

In the meanwhile I embrace you cordially and remain ever -

Yours,
A. R.

53. To the cleric Giuseppe Fiacchetti at Domodossola

Stresa, 4 February 1842

My dear son in Christ,

I am extremely displeased to hear that in that house there is lacking the perfect union which is the sign of the disciples of Jesus Christ, and so of the members of the Institute, which professes such discipleship. It is true that in your letter you accuse yourself of many defects in general, *especially interior ones*, but you do not specify any. Instead you assure me that you love your brethren and seek your and their perfection. But at the same time you assert that A. has avoided you for six weeks, and you say that 'if they tell you about your defects it is only when they have something against you, and not otherwise.' In this way you show that you make yourself the judge of their intentions, whereas humility is what our Lord Jesus Christ commands, when he says *Do not judge*. My dear brother, it is to be feared, unfortunately, that there is not yet to be found in your heart humility, self-denial or the charity of Christ. It is one thing to believe that you love your brethren, and quite another to do so in reality. Anyone who does not know how to *be humble and deny himself* does not know how to love as our Lord wishes. He may be

on friendly terms according to the opinion of the world, but he will never have the charity of Jesus. The first sort of love is unstable and capricious; the second is unchangeable and ever the same, because it is founded in Christ, who does not change. 'Charity,' says St Paul, 'is patient, is kind, is not envious, thinks no evil, *bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*' But you, instead of bearing and enduring everything, are resentful and take offence. And God forbid that it was you who, at least in part, were the cause of the discord that has arisen among the brethren who ought to be one in Christ. I say this because (I repeat), in your letter, though you accuse yourself of defects in general, you say nothing about the cause of so great a harm. Alas, I am afraid that you have not understood that great saying which is the foundation of the Institute - that 'there is no good other than holiness and perfection; and that this unique good, this treasure, is only to be obtained if we humble ourselves, deny ourselves, crucify ourselves, without ceasing. *Anyone who wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.*'

My doubts arise from this: if you had well understood that teaching, so profound and contrary to our natural inclinations, and taught to the world by the *Incarinate Word*, our one Teacher of truth, there could be no doubt that you would show yourself anxious to humble yourself, to become little, to take the blame always, to search in your own faults for the origin of all the evils, and to groan and beg at the feet of the crucified Jesus, asking him to overcome in you and banish all the hardness of self-love, of pride and self-esteem, and of confidence in your own opinions; for scripture tells us that he is able to melt with his fire the very mountains. Then there is no doubt that you would have an insatiable appetite for humiliations and even disgrace, and that you would take the lowest place among your companions in everything - not just in words but in deeds - looking on yourself as the refuse and bane of the house. '*Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? (asks St James) Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you?*' And he adds: '*You ask and you do not receive because you ask wrongly.*'

So here is the remedy, my dear brother: humble yourself, not by halves but wholly and from your heart, and not with empty sentiments and even emptier words. And since this entire humbling of yourself can only be the work of the divine grace and mercy which illuminates and vivifies, pray, and pray at all times, and make acts of the greatest humility. Never let your thoughts dwell on the defects of others or the wrongs they may have done you. We must instead be concerned only and without limit over our own faults, injustices, ignorance, presumption and so on. We can never have too much compunction; we must distrust our feelings, our thoughts, words and actions, even when they seem to us to have no harm in them. We must be convinced that we are blind and foolish; that we can never be sure of anything, and that God alone is our judge . . . that his most searching gaze sees everything: sees whether our heart is upright or not; sees our secret vices, and (heaven forbid) perhaps also hidden corruption and festering evil.

So, my dear brother, let there be an end from now on for ever to any sign of discord *on your part*. If others fail in their duty, do not concern yourself. But be greatly concerned not to do so yourself. Lament over this and pray: God will hear your prayer. Make sure that you *treat all alike*, with no special attachments, as is required by both charity and our rules. Your countenance and demeanour should be consistently friendly and serious, with no trace of affectation. If others act differently, take no notice, and do not follow suit. Instead use the occasion to humble yourself, as if they had acted rightly. Do not look to your companions for corrections, for this would be against Common Rule No. 24. But if in fact they do correct you, be grateful to them. But rather wish very much that your brethren should make known your defects to your Superior (Common Rule No. 22). When in fact you feel happy about this, and grateful to your companions, this will be a sign that you are beginning to love virtue *sincerely*. Your soul should be

open to Superiors, for it is through them that God makes known his will and communicates grace. Blessed are those who know the infinite value of those words left us by Jesus: 'He who hears you hears me'!

As for the favour you ask of me - that you should be dispensed from the office of Prefect - I will write about this to your Superior. May Jesus Christ make you appreciate the truth of what I have written to you, and move your heart to put these things in practice. Then only will you carry through your holy vocation to a happy ending.

Your father in Christ,
A. ROSMINI p.

54. To Suor Carlotta Zanolla at Domodossola

Stresa, 5 February 1842

My dear daughter in Christ,

This is the will of God: that you should not think about yourself, but put yourself in the hands of your Superiors as in those of God himself. You should not desire to receive the habit or to take any other step; but simply to wait in patience until Superiors speak and decide matters themselves, according as the Lord may inspire them. You should think only of carrying out the duties belonging to your holy vocation, and be content to live day by day, without concerning yourself with tomorrow or with what may become of you. If you act like this you will please the Lord and reach the end for which you were created, and in addition were called to the state of religious perfection. So be humble and mortified: do not look on yourself as worthy of anything, and then you will be at peace, and be quite happy if you are forgotten or made to wait. Yes, my dear daughter, this is the way to reach heaven; and this is the only true advice anyone could give you.

So do not think about useless things. Those thoughts which are concerned with yourself and with knowing what your Superiors are going to do with you come, for the most part, from that great evil, self-love. It is this that you have to overcome with the grace of Jesus Christ. Nor should you wish to leave the Institute, as you say; but you should want to live and die in it, leading a humble, hard-working existence, abandoned to God, and trying to learn all that is put before you. So take courage! Leave aside all thoughts of yourself, and instead think only of imitating our Lord Jesus Christ.

Yours,
A. R.

55. To the student Pietro Banchini at Domodossola

Stresa, 6 February 1842

My dear son in Christ,

I was very pleased to receive your letter. What you say leads me to reflect on and get you to consider the importance of being attached with all your heart to whatever position divine Providence assigns to you, intent only on carrying out your duties promptly, as we are taught to do by Common Rule No. 16 and No. 16 of the fifth Spiritual Lesson. You see how natural human instability, as well as the promptings of our spiritual enemy, distract and disturb you! When you were a novice, your thoughts were on study; now that you are a Scholastic, you think about the noviciate. But by contrast, what does the law of perfection say? Every state and condition in which Superiors place me is equally

good. I must love it and find in it my eternal salvation like the treasure in the field that we read about in the gospel. How is this treasure to be found? By working and tilling the field. So what does a lover of perfection need to do? He must love the position in which he finds himself and fulfil all its duties. At present God wants you to study; so love your studies and give all your care to them. He wishes you to study letters; so do not think about philosophy, but rather appreciate the beauty of all the writers who are assigned to you, so as to learn about language and style, prose and poetry. But should your Superiors wish you to go back to the noviciate and give you some other position, be equally content, equally grateful to the Lord, and employ yourself in doing what is assigned to you, profiting from it as much as possible. How safe is this way of acting! It leads us directly and smoothly to our sublime destination. For by following it we truly arrive at denial of ourselves and of self-love, and at the renunciation of natural inclinations, in order to follow God alone. In this way we put into practice that precept, first given by a wise Greek and applied by St Ambrose to Abraham: *Sequere Deum* [follow God's leading]. So make it your care to derive maximum profit from the studies to which for now God has applied you, and realize that *belles lettres* are a great means of serving God, to the benefit of your neighbour, if he would have you use them in this way. And indeed, without skill in the art of eloquence, how can the gospel be proclaimed? Pleasing and attractive expression greatly helps to draw even those who are spiritually infirm to hear the word of truth. So make sure you study diligently this subject which is so important in the exercise of charity. I am glad that you enjoy Dante, Petrarch and Cicero. These are truly great models to follow, and will greatly help you. To these you could add Casa's *Galateo*, the letters of Caro, the lives of the holy Fathers and the Little Flowers of St Francis. For the rest, it seems to me that you could easily become the top pupil if you wished - is that not so?

As for the defects you accuse yourself of, since God has given you the light to know them, fight against them with determination, and in particular pray constantly, with humility and fervour, asking that you may be able to overcome the defects that chiefly trouble you, and see to it that you succeed.

I urge you among other things to have a great love for all your brethren, to be cheerful during recreation, to enjoy all the good things they say to you in conversation. Remember that it is an act of charity to show *appreciation* of what others say to you and to contribute to the common good by being sociable. Above all, trust in God: for certain victory comes through this, not through ourselves. We do a great wrong to the infinite divine goodness when we are hesitant and wavering, instead of throwing ourselves wholly into God's hands. And if we do not at once receive the graces we ask for, it is simply because God wants first to humble us, make us feel our need of him, test our perseverance in our faith in him and our constancy in prayer. Anyone who is faithful in prayer is sure to obtain everything he asks for. This is the sure way to become holy: the promises of Jesus Christ never fail.

My dear son, say a 'Hail Mary' for me to our good Mother. Goodbye.

Your father in Christ,
ROSMINI p.

56. To His Eminence Cardinal Castracane in Rome

Stresa, 7 February 1842

Your Eminence,

Your esteemed letter greatly comforted me, and especially the latter part in which you assure me that: *the Holy Father has not in the least altered his opinion of you, no*

matter what people are saying: he well knows the soundness of your teachings, which are quite undeserving of the charges that have been brought against them. And since [because of these attacks] I have suffered no little distress, I feel I must thank you with all my heart for this assurance. It is not that I had any doubts about the fatherly charity of the Holy Father, from whom in the past I have received so many proofs of his kind sympathy. But I thought that perhaps the Lord wished to subject the new Institute to those hard trials (even though they are transient) with which he is wont to test the faith of his servants. And unfortunately I had good reason to fear this, seeing that messages and letters were being sent from Rome, even from persons of distinction, which maintained that the Pope was very angry with me, and added this and that particular which made the assertion plausible. Nor did they fail to declare that the indignation of the Holy Father was not against the Institute of Charity but regarded me personally. This was all the more hurtful since it banished the idea that these rumours proceeded from a jealous party spirit, as some of those who were favourable to us believed.

Meanwhile, it is not easy to estimate the harm done to the Institute by a rumour purporting to come from high authority and spread around so widely. But I see proof daily of the effects; and to mention but one: my companions who are working in the Midland District of England blame these rumours for the failure of their plan to build a noviciate; because the gentleman who had promised us his land has gone back on his word, as also did another gentleman who had offered three thousand pounds towards the construction. So all of a sudden we lack the means of building a house so necessary for the formation of our religious in that country.

May God be blessed and praised if the rumours spread about are false, and if the Holy Father recognizes the injustice done to me through the attribution of those hateful charges against my doctrines. They are so evidently far from the truth that they could not have done any harm either to me or to the Institute, had they not constituted an abuse of the authority of the Pope, and so compromised in some sense the Holy See itself.

But although for me personally it is enough that I now know the true opinion of the Pope, that is not enough, Your Eminence, to obviate the harm which is being done to the Institute by this scheming. I am not referring so much to what is being written - that can be refuted - but rather to the lies in circulation about the nature of the Institute. Nor is it enough to reassure the persons in high places, both ecclesiastical and secular, in whom the false rumours inspire distrust, leading them to believe that I have lost the good will of the Pope and have become suspect in the eyes of the Holy See. Only the Holy Father himself could remedy these ills entirely if he would make public those paternal feelings towards me of which you, to my great consolation, assure me. It would be a tremendous benefit were the Holy Father to take such action on behalf of our humble Institute against these calumnies, and in this way support the work which he himself began by giving it his pontifical approval. That, Your Eminence, is what at present the Institute is in great need of. Perhaps you will be so kind as to consider these things before God, and help and guide us in this crisis. Meanwhile we can only commend the matter to God and to the Blessed Virgin in whom we also place our hopes.

With my deepest respect I remain your humble servant,
A. R., Provost General of the Institute of Charity.

(That the campaign waged against Rosmini was indeed inspired by jealousy was also the belief of Pope Gregory XVI, as is clear from the letter of Cardinal Castracane to Rosmini on 30 January 1843 - a letter preserved in the Rosminian Archives at Stresa. (cf. the *Vita di A. R.* vol. II, p. 92, and the *Vita di Luigi Gentili* written by G. B. Pagani, p. 261.

57. To Germinio Martinelli at Domodossola

Stresa, 8 February 1842

My dear son in Christ,

I read with pleasure the account you give of yourself. Make every effort you can to attain all the virtues that are necessary for the holy vocation to which God has deigned to call you. You have a great obligation, my dear brother, to correspond with this grace! All the more so because by doing so fully, constantly and unreservedly you will be able to preserve this great gift and reach the end for which you were created and to which you were called.

So first of all I urge you to cultivate *recollection* and *interior fervour*. Pray mentally, speak continually with God, with Christ, heart to heart. Walk always in the presence of God: invoke him, thank him; humble yourself and feel compunction.

Secondly, I recommend you as strongly as I can to have a great appreciation of your rules: love them, and give to others an example of most faithful *observance*. Never allow yourself to be scandalized or led astray by faults you see in other people.

In the third place, *study hard*, especially Latin. Make sure that you pay great attention to this, because if you learn it perfectly it will help you greatly in exercising charity towards your neighbour.

In all this, my dear brother, I want you use every effort - and all for love of God. Try to develop a taste for the Latin writers, and practise both writing and speaking the language.

But the main thing is still that you should succeed in becoming *a true religious*, a son of the Institute - humble, obedient, full of the spirit of self-denial and of charity towards your neighbour, indifferent in all things until you know the divine will. But once this is made known to you by the voice of Superiors, be no longer indifferent, but rather zealous, courageous and diligent in fulfilling it entirely and perfectly. You will achieve this if you become a man of prayer. May God bless you, and Jesus keep you in his heart.

Yours in Christ,
R.

58. To Don Luigi Gentili at Grace Dieu

Stresa, 10 February 1842

My dear brother in Christ,

Let us see to it that we go forward trusting in the Lord, doing all the good we can, working simply and uprightly, without too many reflections or calculations based on human prudence, and with true love for all. I would not like any touch of ill-feeling to find a place in your heart, my dear Luigi. No: nothing but love, uprightness, kindness and respect for others. I greatly desire (and I pray for this daily) that you should become holy; and I fully trust in the Lord that you will surely do so - but only by virtue of submission and docility to the judgement of Superiors, trying always to persuade yourself interiorly of the rightness of their reasons, and putting aside your own views when they do not meet with the approval of those Superiors. Holiness is only to be found in humility and self-denial: this is what Jesus Christ teaches us, and we have to distrust any other thought, however attractive it may appear.

I can in no way approve of your carrying out even the smallest duties of a Dean. Such a responsibility would make your mission more difficult - and it is already hard enough. God knows that I sympathize with you over this. There is also the consideration that such commitments must make obedience to your own Superiors more difficult, because of the conflicts of interest that could well arise. It is my wish that the most precious virtue of obedience should be kept to perfection among us, because there is no holiness where there is not *perfect obedience*.

I pray always that God will bless your labours and accept the self-sacrifice they involve; and I ask the Lord to send labourers, if it is his will, so that I may be able to help you through them. At the same time I see that we must wait, with resignation and patience, for his mercies, keeping before our minds that great principle: 'He does not exact from us anything more than we are capable of; so we must not be discouraged, but only have pity on the flock without a shepherd and pray'. For this is how our Saviour acted; and he taught us to do the same: '*Seeing the crowds, he had pity on them, for they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples: "The harvest indeed is great, but the labourers are few. So ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers into his harvest."*' My brothers, these words must bring great comfort to you all, as you hear how the Lord himself was short of helpers in the care of his flock and the reaping of his harvest.

I do not want to hide from you the fact that I received from Rome the other day a letter from a Cardinal which assured me of the Holy Father's satisfaction with what I have written. He fully recognized the soundness of my doctrine, and added further gracious words. Thanks be to God.

Yours,
A. R.

59. To Don Antonio Missiaglia in Verona

Rovereto, 27 February 1842

Reverend and dear Don Antonio,

I shall probably go through Verona when I go back, and I shall certainly make a point of doing so if you consider this will be useful or necessary to you. For the rest, do not think that I have simply been moved by the requests that have come to me on your behalf. I am too deeply persuaded of the preciousness of the religious vocation to allow myself to be the cause of any unnecessary delay when others wish to embrace such a vocation. So do indeed prepare yourself so that next autumn you may make the complete sacrifice of yourself that God, by knocking at the door of your heart, asks of you. By entering the Institute of Charity you will take on a manner of life in which a man lives no longer for himself, but solely for God and his neighbour, for whom he longs to give his life and his blood after the example of his divine Master. For *By this we know God's love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for our brethren*.

The time you will be spending in Verona up to the coming autumn holidays will help you to dispose of your affairs, so that you can take the great step unburdened by such things. So try, my dear Don Antonio, to increase if possible your fervent prayers in the meantime, since this is the most sure and indispensable way to arrive at our goal of being entirely consecrated to the service of God, instruments in the hands of our Creator, who will then use us as he wills.

So begin in these coming months, as far as you can, a sort of noviciate: I mean a life of greater retirement, recollection, interior conversation and union with God - as far as your circumstances permit. Grow too in the love of poverty and in the meekness

of our Lord; and try to love to be forgotten by men, despised, separated from your birthplace and detached from all the things that our nature loves, out of our desire to follow and imitate our crucified Lord Jesus Christ, the one Master, the one Good of our souls. You may be sure that the more you pray, and the greater the efforts you make to be generous in the offering of yourself, the greater the consolation you will feel, and the more light you will have to realize the sublimity and beauty of the vocation to which you have been called, and be enabled to fulfil it successfully.

During your holy retreat, pray for me and for all your present and future brethren. I must add that that I too consider it necessary for you to keep *altogether secret* this resolution of yours. You may be sure also that the devil will do all he can to break down your resolution, or at least make you defer fulfilling it. But God will give you the grace to overcome his attacks.

I shall be grateful if you will let me know how far you consider it useful or necessary for me to travel by way of Verona and visit you. I will then let you know my plans. I do not see any possibility of my leaving Rovereto in less than a fortnight.

I remain, with a fond embrace in the Sacred Heart,

Yours affectionately,
A. ROSMINI p.

60. To Don Antonio Piceni at San Carlo near Arona

Rovereto, 7 March 1842

Reverend and dear Don Antonio,

The disquiet you tell me feel concerning the validity of your baptism is nothing new: I have seen it in others. And it is clearly a suggestion coming from the devil, permitted by God in order to stimulate us to strive for perfection, and to give us greater assurance of our own salvation. This effect is one you admit to having experienced yourself. It is easy to overcome this worry - simply by recalling that the baptism of desire is just as valid as actual baptism, when this is not to be had. Now, even if your baptism was not valid, you certainly cannot receive a second baptism. So merely through desiring the sacrament, any possible defect that there may have been when baptism was conferred on you is remedied. This judgement leaves no room at all for doubt; and you must trust it, so that you will think no more about the matter, and admit no other argument.

As for your vocation to religious life, yes, this is a very important matter, and one that must be thought about most earnestly, courageously and constantly; and you must take action without delay. So try to make a choice, moved by high and lofty motives; and settle on a religious institute in which you can best make an entire and unlimited sacrifice of yourself to God. The urge you have felt for some time towards such a decision, the pleasant experience you had when you shared the regular life for a time, the detachment you feel from the things of this world, the fact that you are of an age sufficiently mature to make such a decision - these things form so many reasons to persuade me that you undoubtedly have a vocation. All the same you could first make another retreat, so as to receive further light about God's will, and the grace to fulfil it. If you decide to do this, I would suggest that you should give priority during your time of withdrawal to searching out the real nature of perfection - so as not only to choose the religious state in general but also to select among the many varieties it takes, the most perfect one for your needs.

My dear Don Antonio, commend to the Lord your humble and affectionate servant and brother in Christ -

A. ROSMINI p.

61. To Don Emilio Belisy at Prior Park

Rovereto, Good Friday (25 March) 1842

My dear brother in Christ,

I gladly received and read most attentively the *Memorial* you sent me on 16 February, in which you not only describe generally the state of affairs there at Prior Park, but give me a vivid picture of how things are with that establishment and with our little religious family.

I greatly sympathize over the difficult circumstances in which you find yourselves; but since these things are so disposed by God, I look on them (as I hope you all do) as a precious occasion which the Creator gives you so as to exercise and train you in virtue, and particularly in Christian prudence. This is the reflection which should make you love these difficulties: there is nothing good, nothing to be loved and desired, except the merit than can only be obtained through spiritual combat. 'Only he who has fought on the side of right shall be crowned. Again, 'virtue is made perfect in infirmity'. This virtue is the aim and end of our Institute: it is to this that all the love of our heart is directed.

But I think it is needless to write at length to encourage you in your duty there, which is to stand firm in your resolve to satisfy all the obligations which arise from the circumstances in which God has placed you. So too I need not stop to praise the various things that I see and find praiseworthy in the Lord when I look at the conduct of our brethren there in England. It is better that all your praise, and your reward, come from God. Instead, I would rather comment on certain things that impressed me not a little as I read your *Memorial*; and I think and hope that my remarks may be useful for you, if you will consider them before the Lord.

First, I cannot approve of your refusal to examine the seminarians; and it seems to me that the reproof Fr Vice-Provincial gave you was justified. The reasons which persuaded you to act as you did were subtle, but they were not well-founded. Our situation is a delicate one, and we have to be tolerant towards anything in which there is no sin. So too we must never exaggerate and find sin where there is none. All these considerations should have persuaded you to fulfil that duty with a good will.

The accusations brought against us, to the extent that they are unfounded, need not cause us any fear. But we should make an effort to profit by them, both to know ourselves better and to cure ourselves of the defects which we come to know about in the light of the criticisms levelled at us by others. I should like those who have enemies to read for their consolation the little work of the kindly Plutarch: *On drawing profit from our enemies*. Now, where I fear we may be in the wrong is over the accusation that we are doing little. And I base my fear on my general experience of our brethren in Italy where, once they have come to enjoy the comfortable tenor of regular life and the routine of pious exercises, they become lazy over other things, slow to act, reluctant to alter the order of their occupations and not at all disposed to preserve an interior solitude, recollection and union with God, in the midst of their active duties. And so they do not esteem such activities as they deserve: they are not convinced that such work is the service of God and a true and acceptable prayer. They regard external services from a material point of view, so that their work becomes an occasion of distraction: they feel they are doing no good, or that they will lose their interior spirit by giving themselves to such activity. But this is a very grave mistake and something very far from the spirit of the Institute of Charity, which bases itself on the words: *This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you*, and tends to make its

members (according to the dispositions of divine Providence) most active in everything, and wishes them to know how to leave God for God. It would have them ready at a sign from Providence to leave the delights of the contemplative life and joyfully accept the labours involved in the active life. Hence they should make it their care to learn how to adore God with all their heart, and for his sake alone to give themselves to external occupations; and while for the sake of charity they speak with others, their conversation should at the same time be in heaven. They must, like their Master, be models of prayer to those who have withdrawn from the world, and yet be examples of activity to the people in the everyday world. This is why in our Constitutions it is laid down that at the outset we ought to choose the contemplative life; but subsequently, when God so calls us, we must abandon this for the active life. And so No. 496 of the Constitutions says: 'There will not be many prayers prescribed in common (except for the unbroken hour of meditation), on account of the works of charity which may occur. Superiors will be able to establish prayers for individuals or for all as they judge best and in so far as time is available, or leave them to the devotion of each.' And No.17 of the Sixth Maxim shows us what sort of activity is fitting for us: 'In this way it sometimes happens that the humble and fervent Christian who would never think of choosing any but a hidden life, withdrawn from the dangers of the world - a life of perpetual contemplation, divided between much prayer and study, or the exercise of some profession, or of some mechanical art, with attention to the needs of life and some short intervals of rest - is drawn by the force of charity from his retirement, which he loves not through sloth but through sincere humility, and is led into an active life; and if such be the will of God, is plunged, for the service of his neighbour, even into a sea of cares and troubles, of business and occupations, important or unimportant, honourable or abject, according to the order in which God has willed that they should come to him.'

And this is precisely the case with my dear brethren at Prior Park. There, the authorities not only expect activity: they demand it. So we have to give it, even when it means reducing the exercises of the contemplative life. It means being active for God and in God, subject only to the discretion and judgement of Superiors, who must ensure that the brethren do not overtax their strength, and who must constantly impress on them the need to preserve interior union with God in the midst of their active works. They will recommend too a continual direction of the intention to God, the use of ejaculatory prayers, and acts of self-offering and self-denial. In short, I should like to see us surpass all others in activity, giving all to understand that in this also we are led by the most active spirit of God.

It may be objected that our daily routine does not allow us to do many things. But the Constitutions teach us to deviate from our normal programme in favour of works of charity. In No. 494 we read: 'While they remain in the elective state, all their time is to be employed in some useful and holy occupation, since an account will have to be rendered to God for every single moment of time, as well as for all the other talents he has committed to us. A 24-hour timetable is to be established from the beginning, but it does not bind a member if some charitable work supervenes.' And as for the Rules of Domestic Order, since these were written for houses of regular observance, they do not wholly apply to Missions like yours. It is true that for the noviciate certain exercises are prescribed rigorously; but since that is not a noviciate house, these rules cannot be applied. Nor can they come into force completely until God is pleased to give us a noviciate house in that country - though I hope that through his mercy we shall eventually have one in Loughborough.

As for the activities of our brethren there at Prior Park for the benefit of the college: I should like them to be able to offer the eight hours a day that the Bishop wants, as long as their health allows this. And in view of this great act of charity, you may dispense them from every duty that is not strictly obligatory, apart from the hour of

meditation; and even this could be reduced for some, provided that they individually ask for such a dispensation from the Superior General. And indeed how acceptable to God would be such activity undertaken solely out of love for him! Since we live by faith, we can surely expect grace in abundance to compensate for what we would have received through our usual pious practices. Charity expects great things: and therefore so does the Institute of Charity. And these great things can only come if we greatly develop our charitable activity. The outside world also expects much, and expends great energy. But it is not the energy of charity. The Institute expects immense activity, but in the charity of Christ. Perhaps not many of our members have yet sufficiently understood this. Most of them are still novices, and they stop short at the beginning of the Institute, which is the contemplative life; and they do not go forward in mind and heart to its goal, which is the most active external charity, *our Lord's own commandment*. But Jesus Christ has set them on the road; and he will lead them all where his Spirit ever guides them. *I cherish this as my hope.*

I hope too that my brethren will devote all possible energy for the good of that college and to satisfy the Bishop's wishes. I do not think you should worry whether that foundation succeeds or not; and we should never allow such considerations to influence us. It is my belief that the more perfect thing is to work out of charity with simplicity and perseverance, leaving God to dispose of his servants as he pleases. And if it should happen that we are unable to do much good there, we may have to be content with preventing things from going wrong. Further, if we speak the truth with humility, treat people with humility, and work humbly and patiently in active charity, we may be sure that this will help some of the individuals there, even if it does not benefit the college itself. The various defects you notice do not mean that the work of the college and the seminary is not good in itself. So it is not our business to take note of what may not be done properly. It is enough if what we do is good. I am afraid, my dear Emilio, that you exaggerate matters. It seems to me that your reasoning is too subtle and that your outlook is tinged with severity and over-strictness. I put this down to your youth and inexperience. So it is all the more necessary for you to respect the opinion of your Father Provincial, even though some subtle reasons may incline you to think differently. I am sure that you really value his views; I know that God gives you the virtue of obedience and great docility; but at the same time I see clearly too that sometimes you are inclined to split hairs: you have not yet acquired the breadth of view that only comes with age, and through listening with respect to the views of others who are more mature.

It is very easy to offend by making cutting remarks. I do not say categorically that you have done so, but I notice that you argue a lot. I am aware, unfortunately, from my own experience, that when we argue and want to prove something clearly to others, we tend to use certain expressions in order to render the truth more cogent, even when we do not exaggerate. Such expressions, if they do not go beyond the truth, are natural and acceptable in a learned treatise; but they rarely have a good effect in conversation, where we may offend others without meaning to, since they generally resent it if they see that what we are saying is only too true, or that we are too positive about our views. So try as far as you possibly can to avoid any expressions which contain ridicule, or are biting or sarcastic, even if it seems to you that they suit the case. I know how difficult it is to follow this advice at all times: great calmness of mind and meekness of heart are needed; but try your best.

For the rest, I am not against your telling the Bishop what you think, in all simplicity. Indeed I would have all our brethren show openly and expound (again with meekness and humility) the principles which they have at heart and which our Institute professes. This I consider is very fitting in your circumstances, and I see it as the one way in which you and the others can do good; since by making known gently but firmly

the true principles of piety, of Church discipline, of wise methods of education and of Christian philosophy, you will be able to win over the minds and hearts of those who are well disposed. By speaking the truth sincerely, clearly and often, by arguing quietly, without giving offence or trying to score points, you will bring about great good. For you will hasten the solution of the problem of our presence at Prior Park, and do so *according to God*.

May our loving Saviour speak to you today from his cross, and bless you all.
Show this letter to dear Fr Vice-Provincial. Good bye.

A. R.

In December 1842 Belisy was called to Loughborough, where Pagani had founded a new house in the previous year, and the mission at Prior Park came to an end

62. To Fr Peter Hutton in England

Stresa, 29 April 1842

My dear brother in Christ,

I read with great joy the letter in which you express your excellent dispositions. Let us be grateful for the divine goodness which has brought us together in his love so that we may be one heart and one soul, and so that our Lord Jesus Christ may see in us the fulfilment of his prayer (may it be so, as I hope!) - when he said to his Father: *'May they all be one, even as you, Father, are in me and I am in you, that they also may be one in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me'* (Jn 17:21). In these words, my dear brother, we have a summary of our Constitutions, and the basis of our hope. Relying on this we can dare to undertake the great things we purpose. Our one foundation is the prayer of our Saviour: *I do not pray only for these, but for those also who will believe in me through their word*. But for this, what can we possibly presume to do - we who are only a 'little flock'? Yet in Christ, and in his all-prevailing prayer, *we can do all things*. So God be praised for adding you to our little company without allowing you to be scandalized by our weakness and nothingness - for we truly are like 'things that are not'. Ah, my dear brother, it is precisely for this reason that we hope to see God glorified in us. So let us simply abandon ourselves to him, and put no limits to his boundless wisdom and love by any ideas or limited feelings of our own. Let him do with us as he wishes, make use of us in any part of the world, in any position, in every kind of situation, 'in ill fame or good fame', amidst moral dangers or in safe havens, whether we endure trials or enjoy consolations. Ah! how good and wonderful it is for us all to be totally consecrated to him without limit! Include me, I beg you, in your good prayers; for, my dear brother, this is the greatest need of -

Yours affectionately in Christ,
A. R.

Fr Peter Hutton, who was already the President of St Peter's College and professor of Greek and Latin at Prior Park, entered the Institute in 1841. He was an excellent religious, and did great work for the English Province, as Master of Novices, as Rector of several houses, as a missionary, and lastly as a tireless champion of the Classics and the President of Ratcliffe College.

70. To Don Paolo Barola in Rome

Stresa, 9 May 1842

My dear Don Paolo,

Your letters are very dear to me, since they show me the kindness of your heart and assure me that the delightful friendship we have established in Christ will never fail. I am most obliged to you for all that you tell me you have done on my behalf and (as I hope) on behalf of truth and our holy religion.

The name you mention - that of Cardinal Ostini - is particularly dear to me, and I am obliged to him for many previous favours. The breadth of his mind, his teaching, and the lofty frankness of his character make me see in him a person especially suitable to pass judgements on the controversies raised against me, and to be an effective defender of the truth when such deplorable efforts are being made to obscure it. I would write to him myself, if I did not fear that my letter would waste some of his precious time. On the other hand, I trust that if he has begun to read the articles that have come out (as you assure me he has), he will of his own accord act in the cause of truth and that of a maligned priest whom he has earlier honoured with the title of friend. I say 'a maligned priest' because my adversaries were not content to misrepresent my teaching in the published writings you know about, but they also - through private letters and spoken confidences - spread all through Italy and beyond the most barefaced lies. Among these I think I must number the report which (so I have just been told) is spreading consternation among many of my well-wishers in Verona. This is to the effect that a sentence of condemnation has been issued against my 'Treatise on Conscience'. It is also being said that 'Rome wishes the news to be spread about by degrees, to avoid causing a sensation, and so it is to pass from one mouth to another in confidence.'! How deplorable all this is. And the origin of all these rumours is one man alone - as you very well know.

For the rest, my dear Don Paolo, see to it, I beg you, that Cardinal Ostini is fully aware of the matter: this will be a great help. And be good enough also to give him my respects. Write to me often, and keep me informed about everything. But above all, recommend me to the Lord and to the Blessed Virgin, whose motherly protection I daily experience, even though I make so little return for her love.

Yours,
R.

Ostini was first a Professor in the Gregorian University and then Nuncio in Vienna. He had just been made a Cardinal.

64. To the Sister of Providence Anna Maria Alvazzi at Locarno

Stresa, 14 May 1842

My dear daughter in Christ,

What you tell me about Suor Francesca - that she is fond of mixing with the pupils - does not seem to me a defect, as long as she leaves them at the call of obedience. Indeed I should like all the Sisters to be on friendly terms with those they teach.

See to it that Suor Marta overcomes the anxiety she shows over her health. It would be a good idea to give her to read the fine instruction St Teresa gave to her Sisters on the subject of health: it is to be found in the large Life of the saint.

Persuade Suor Filomena that she does not offend against the Rule when she asks Superiors for some dispensation which is necessary because of bodily infirmity. When she does this with humility and docility over their decision, it is in fact a meritorious act.

Encourage her to cultivate a certain freedom of spirit in this matter, and bear with her with motherly patience.

You must strictly forbid the Portress and any other Sister from eating anything outside the house, or even in the house, without permission; and let me remind you that obedience over this point is important, so that the Portress, if she does not mend her ways, will have to be dismissed.

As for yourself: even if it were true that there are other Sisters who, if they were put in your place, could do better, what does this matter? Have you any reason to concern yourself with such thoughts? Instead, you should simply think about doing the best you can in your present position. Any other thoughts are worthless, and can only upset you. Our outward actions do not take us away from God if they are done out of love. So offer everything to him; do everything for him; and he will communicate his presence in your soul even in the midst of all your external activities. I fully approve of your accompanying the pupils in the Rogation and Corpus Christi processions, seeing to it that all is orderly, and preserving your recollection as far as possible. May the Lord send down his Holy Spirit on all of you. Amen.

Your father in Christ,
ROSMINI p.

65. To Don Giacomo Bernardo Mazzi in Rome

Stresa, 14 May 1842

My dear brother in Christ,

Do not grieve at all over the persecution that has been directed towards us. Be sure that God disposes these things for our good - especially so that we may correct our defects and cling more closely to him; we must not be so feeble as to expect everything to be plain sailing, with the wind behind us. Rather, we have to go against the current if we are to hold our course. So I constantly thank God for this trial, and I defend myself only to the extent that I think this is my duty. We shall not live for all that long, my dear brother, but if God is so good as to receive us into his eternal dwelling, from there we shall see the Institute established in such a way that it can no longer be hidden, because it will be on a hilltop. So let us remain in peace of mind, and do nothing except pray humbly to the Lord for his grace and his love. May our Lord Jesus Christ send you the Spirit of his own heart. Amen.

Your affectionate father in Christ,
ROSMINI p.

66. To Matteo Teodoro Col at Domodossola

Stresa, 25 June 1842

My dear son in Christ - the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen

My dear Matteo, you must not think I did not read the paper you gave me when I paid a visit to that house. Indeed I read it with pleasure, and the proof is this reply.

I thank God that he has given you the light and strength to have a high esteem for the state to which he has called you, as well as to relish the labours and mortifications that go with it. These must be the way to heaven for all of us, as long as we receive them readily and bear them on our shoulders in a spirit of meekness and repentance, putting our trust in the strength and fortitude God has promised us. He is

faithful, and if we fight righteously we shall overcome all our enemies by the power of his infinite mercy. So you wish for a penance? Here it is: look at each of the faults that you believe you have discovered in yourself and which you have described in the note you gave me, and for each one of them say a 'Hail Mary', praying in faith to our Lady to free you from it. Then keep a watch over yourself to see that you do not fall into it again. Above all I should like you to become *very meek*, so that you never feel resentment over anything at all, but accept everything with peace of mind, love and thanksgiving to God. May Jesus bless you, and his Blessed Mother always intercede for you. Good bye.

Your father in Christ,
A. ROSMINI p.

67. To Arnaldo Fehr at Domodossola

Stresa, 27 June 1842

My dear son in Christ,

I was greatly consoled to hear that you have resolved, by the grace of God, to be perfect in obedience, the obedience which means a total sacrifice of self until death. Such obedience is surely the compendium of all the virtues, because it makes us like Christ, who *was obedient unto death, even death on a cross*, and suffered a death that was shameful, the death of a criminal.

But I found in your letter things that are a long way from true spiritual wisdom. With regard to the common saying, 'No one is a fit judge in his own cause' you make a distinction: you say that anyone who judges himself out of passion is no good judge; but anyone who makes a judgement free of passion is a good judge of himself. But this argument is false, because it is a circular one. Why do we say that no one is a good judge in his own cause? It is precisely because no one can be sure that passion does not enter in to his judgement. For passion hides itself from the eyes of the man who is most affected by it. And this is because God denies light to those who try to judge themselves against the view of wise people and Superiors, and in this way punishes their presumption. Ah, my dear Arnaldo, the saints were always distrustful about themselves, and always wanted to be guided by the authority and judgement of others. You can be certain that spending our time judging and vindicating ourselves is an obstacle to making progress in the spiritual life. It takes away our peace of mind; it destroys true humility in the soul, and sows there instead pride, lessening our respect and love for others, and it renders impossible that blind obedience which is a treasure beyond all price - and which you are so anxious to attain to. Oh how beautiful is distrust of oneself! This should be as great as our trust in God - in other words, boundless. This self-distrust never deceives us; this is not the sort of knowledge that is the fruit of the forbidden tree, but rather the fruit of the tree of life. Goodbye.

ROSMINI p.

68. To the Sister of Providence Anna Maria Alvazzi at Locarno

Stresa, 8 July 1842

My dear daughter in Christ,

I do not approve of this desire of yours to make another general confession. When this has once been done one should not want to go back over it; and if you feel any fear that you did not make it well, though at the time it seemed to you all in order, you should go ahead without taking any notice of such doubts. Simply make acts of sorrow for your past sins. Every time we make our confession we should add an overall confession of our previous sins, and in this way receive absolution for them all. Nothing more is needed.

Make clear to Suor Filomena the absolute need to obey her confessor blindly when he tells her to go to Holy Communion without first going to confession, and tell her that the sacrament of the Eucharist itself wins absolution for whatever sins might have been on our soul, when we are sorry for them. When she acts like this there is no danger of sacrilege: she should simply make an act of contrition and have a sincere intention of not offending God again, then go to the altar - Jesus Christ himself acts as the confessor of anyone who acts out of obedience, and he gives absolution for all our sins from his throne of love.

When you are guiding one of your Sisters concerning a matter of conscience you have to observe complete secrecy over what she manifests in confidence, and not take counsel of any of your companions, but turn to God, and consult your Superiors when the right moment comes. But when it is a matter of external things or of the good of the girls, *if you are in doubt*, you would do well to consult your Sisters, and show them how much you esteem them and trust them. Take this middle way, then, with Suor Francesca, advising her *gently* to think of nothing but fulfilling her duties. Any further curiosity over the Sisters would be *an imperfection*. Take courage then: treat your companions with great love, but firmness too. Persuade them to go to confession and to be content with the confessor and the times laid down. Pray for -

Your affectionate father in Christ,
A. ROSMINI p.

69. To Pietro Banchini, a student at Domodossola

Stresa, 12 July 1842

Pietro, my dear son in Christ,

I was very pleased to have your letter. I rejoice to know with what zeal you desire to bind yourself more closely to God and the court of heaven; and you will attain this if you continue ceaselessly to *hope for it*. Try to acquire tranquillity of mind and a holy liberty of conscience, and also to become more perfect in the love of your brethren. This is the most sure way to the love of God. The motto of the members of the Institute of Charity is ‘This is my commandment . . . ’ and that is the text written in the hearts of all the disciples of our Saviour.

I too am of the opinion that you could have done better in your studies this year; that was your duty, and what is every duty for us if not the love of God? The one who does his duty is the one who loves God; but anyone who fails to do so opposes the will of God. So I make allowances for you, Pietro, over what has happened this year, but I expect you to work harder in the year to come. For you are called to exercise charity, and you will not be able to do this in the way and to the extent that God wants if you remain ignorant. May our Blessed Mother console you and obtain all blessings for you from her divine Son.

Your father in Christ,

A. ROSMINI

Provost General of the Institute of Charity

70. To the Countess E. F. di Castellengo in Paris

Stresa, 14 July 1842

My dear Countess,

While I was pleased to hear that you are satisfied over the treatment that your eldest daughter has received there, it grieved me to know that you yourself are now suffering from the same illness. I will get good people to pray for you, as you wish, and offer my own poor prayers to God that the treatment may prove successful and that he will bless you, console you, and give you the strength to bear this trial. May your soul acquire greater merit from it, so that it may become yet more pure and fair in God's eyes as a result of this suffering. Indeed, however much our human nature feels suffering, still a soul schooled by the teachings and example of our Lord Jesus Christ, and especially when illumined by his grace, knows well that illness affords us a precious occasion of earning heavenly merit and becoming like our Lord, by practising the supernatural virtues he himself practised. Such souls, then, accept these trials as special gifts and signs of the love God has for us, since (as scripture says) 'God chastises those he loves.'

I can see from your letter that these sentiments are yours, and so you need not be dismayed if you feel the inevitable repugnance that our human nature has for suffering - since it was created by God for happiness, and a state of suffering is only an irregularity produced by sin. It is enough if in the depths of our soul we are resigned, wish to conform ourselves to the divine will, and weigh matters in the true light of faith. That light shows us that our greatest good lies hidden precisely where our sinful flesh experiences the greatest evil; and so it makes us rejoice over what causes our mortal nature to grieve and groan. So what we need to do is not to try to suppress our natural repugnance over painful things, but to ensure that there coexists with this a supernatural joy which is of a higher order and which can eventually overcome our nature's rebellion. This is why at the start of my letter I did not hesitate to tell you of my sincere grief over

your illness; because such sorrow is not of its nature blameworthy: it only needs to be subordinated to higher spiritual considerations, to the faith which firmly believes in the loving goodness of God, and recognizes this goodness even in the midst of suffering and the trials of life. And so I can add with equal sincerity that, along with my regret over your illness, I praise the Lord who has allowed this for the sake of the great good which he will draw from it.

So who can doubt that the effect of what you are suffering will be a greater purification of your soul, a more complete detachment from earthly things, a more intense union with God and an ardent desire for the things of heaven? You will grow in spiritual enlightenment, and so become disenchanted with the things of this world; you will feel a new fervour and form a lively intention of spending what time remains to you in works for the glory of God, in praising the Lord and in serving him in your neighbour. You will offer up your sufferings in payment of your spiritual debts; and God will gladly accept this voluntary offering. You will have moments when you will feel profoundly your own nothingness, and make these into the acts of humility which form the greatest tribute the creature can give to its Creator. In your trials you will feel intimately your need of God, and you will pour out such prayers as only those in deep distress are capable of making - prayers which will reach the heart of the eternal God. In short you will have occasion to make a thousand acts of the love of God; and these make the soul more holy and assure its eternal salvation. I see all these benefits as the reason your Father in heaven had for submitting you to this trial; they invite you to feel holy hope and joy; and I share these sentiments with you.

For the rest, so that you may carry out these acts more perfectly, and more easily bring it about that your spirit prevails over the infirmity of the flesh, I advise you to have ever present - now more than ever - the maxim given by Jesus Christ: 'Do not be anxious about tomorrow'. Try to distance your thoughts from what the future may hold, and from the fears which such thoughts can cause. This is already a great act of virtue and of abandonment into the loving hands of our Lord. This is what constitutes the way of *simplicity before God* which the scriptures so much praise. For why should we trouble our minds with things we are ignorant of, things which God wishes to keep hidden from us? Why should we add to the ills we have by imagining and fearing ills which do not exist, and which perhaps will never materialize? It is surely better to leave the care of ourselves entirely to God, without wishing to know more, and to live in peace of mind from day to day, hour to hour, fully persuaded that his love for us far surpasses that of the most tender mother? This peace does not mean that we may not turn to him without ceasing, with the most filial confidence, telling him not only of our real needs but also of those which merely spring from our weakness and ignorance. For he will not be offended; he will listen even to these imaginary needs; in his tender love he will take pity on us; and he will either give us the strength we need to deal with reality or satisfy our imaginary needs with the solicitude of a mother. Nor need we worry at the sight of our own defects. Jesus Christ has died for us; he has preserved our

life up to now so that we may have the time to cleanse ourselves in his blood. What matters about our penance is not that it should be long, but that it should be from our heart; and the best penance of all is patience in face of the crosses he sends us. And out of his love he adapts these crosses to what our shoulders can bear - at the same time helping us to carry them.

And so, dear Countess, I counsel largeness of heart, together with sorrow for sin - but sorrow full of trust, sorrow which is transmuted into love. As for the fears which at times our imagination raises in us, these are not sinful: they do not take away our resignation. At times they are no more than new trials which we have to support, like the rest, with spiritual patience.

Remember before the Lord one who declares himself -

Your humble servant in Christ,
A. R.

70. To Suor Costanza Darioli at Domodossola

Stresa, 21 July 1842

My dear Sister,

I know all too well that you are lacking in the mortification taught by our Lord Jesus Christ; that you fail to observe the holy rules on which one day you will be judged by God; and that you do not love the Institute to which the Lord has called you, and in which up to now he has supported you with unbounded love. So this is my answer to your letter: if you wish to go home with your mother you are free to do so; but you will never again return to the Institute. But if you do not want to go home, I will act like the gardener in the gospel with the tree which bore no fruit. I will grant you a year, starting from now, to prove yourself. If within this year you do not show fruits of repentance; if you allow your body to suffer rather than harm your spirit by failing to obey the rules; if you show you are ruled by the spirit of God and by love of your sisters; if you are sincere and upright, without worldly, human aims; in that case you will be tolerated in the Institute. Otherwise you will be dismissed. I assure you that if the reports I receive about you in a year from now do not show an improvement, I will definitively send you packing from the Institute in which you give scandal. May God show you how much penance you need to do to make up for you unworthy conduct in the past.

Your father in Christ,
A. ROSMINI

Provost General of the Institute of Charity

72. To Father James Shepherd at Prior Park

Stresa, 2 August 1842

My dear brother and son in Christ,

I am quite satisfied that these days you should take recreation and give your spirit the relief it needs; and in the circumstances it is better and more pleasing to God that you should omit your meditation and examination of conscience, and make up for the absence of these practices (which are not of obligation) by offering all that you do to God and by the use of frequent but simple ejaculatory prayers. These can also accompany the recreational activities that you will do well to allow yourself, with the upright intention of pleasing God in these also. The Lord is good, and he likes to see his servants gladden their hearts without scruple or sadness when this is necessary, as it is in your case. It is enough if you avoid any culpable action and keep clear of any worldliness or vanity. It is quite possible to enjoy oneself while avoiding these obstacles, so that the enemy may not triumph. A common enough device of the devil is first to push people into excessive austerities or out-of-the-way devotions so that they become tired of such practices, develop an aversion for them, and grow discouraged. They may then react by lapsing into a deplorable laxity. So be on your guard against such a danger. Do not believe that you are obliged to take on extraordinary devotions or superfluous works, but realize that you need only refrain from anything forbidden by God's laws, and must not give yourself over to worldly slackness. Trust in God will be your help in this conflict, and with patience you will win the day and receive from him still further graces.

Your request to be dispensed from your religious vows greatly displeased me. I am quite willing that at present those vows should not be a burden to you, and I will write to your Superior telling him not to impose any further obligations on you than those that are binding on any Christian and Catholic priest. Then you will have no reason to make you wish to be dispensed from the vows of religion. Moreover, we must put our trust in the goodness of God ; but, my dear brother, we must not take back what we have once given him. Jesus Christ is still what he always was - ever good, ever deserving of our love, ever ready to die again so as to redeem our souls. The sweet bonds which unite us with him will serve to make us triumph more easily over our enemies, who would like to see us plunge into worldly dissipation. On the contrary, you must see that your recreations do not lead you to give in to worldliness: you must imitate the saints who, like you, were oppressed by sufferings. God allows this to happen to you so as to test your fidelity in loving him. So do not think of abandoning your holy intentions and loosing yourself from the precious bonds which hold you close to Jesus Christ. Think only of going forward with a generous heart, and so pleasing the Lord and the Holy Spirit. May the Blessed Virgin obtain for you constancy and the confidence you need, and may dear St Philip endow you with the light-heartedness and holy cheerfulness which are a help to both spirit and body. Goodbye.

Your affectionate brother and father in Christ,
A. ROSMINI p.

73, To Don Giacomo Molinari at the Sagra di San Michele

Stresa, 9 August 1842

My dear brother n Christ,

I commend F. to your charity, that you may make him a good religious, with the spirit of the Institute as his foundation. That spirit is one of humility and self-denial. Unfortunately it has not yet sufficiently penetrated into him, which is no wonder, since he is only a beginner. Those who were his Superiors this year tell me that he has committed many and great faults against humility and charity. The root of the trouble is a certain vanity which has got into him. This is the plague of souls, and is a vice which more than any other manages to remain hidden. The result is that anyone who suffers from vanity is never wholly sincere and open, and, being bent on his own interests, forgets those of his brethren, and even Christ himself. You must open his eyes about this whenever he commits some fault; you must at all times correct his intention, and teach him to have no desire for the consideration and praise of others, but rather to be pleased when Superiors know and reprove his defects. Keep a close eye on him to see whether he is bitter and obstinate in arguments with his brethren (and get Paoli to watch him too). If he offends like this, never let the matter pass, but make him at once ask pardon of any of his companions whom he has injured in the slightest. Give him frequent opportunities to humble himself; teach him to put himself below his brethren; and at the first sign that he wants to promote himself, set him in the last place, and leave him there. Get him to do lowly work; do not dispense him from any of the rules, particularly when it comes to study, in which (it seems) he reckons to indulge his vanity and gain esteem. Make him see the true motives he should have for studying. Let him read the *Imitation*, meditating on a part of it each day; and see that he learns by heart the most relevant sentences. Use both charity and firmness, and act in concert with Paoli in all this. It is necessary for all the scholastics to continue with their religious education during their studies, but this is especially the case with this dear brother of ours. You must keep me informed about his spiritual progress, for this is very close to my heart. Goodbye.

Yours affectionately in Christ,
ROSMINI p.

74. To the abbé Henri de Bonnechose

Stresa, 16 August 1842

My dear brother in Christ,

Your departure from Stresa has, I might say, left a void in my heart. A man can get used to pleasant things, and I had grown so used to the pleasure of conversing with you, even for a short while, that I feel the lack of it, I assure you. When two people fully share religious sentiments, this is something very agreeable and consoling, especially when we recall our Lord's words: 'Whenever two of you on earth agree about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven' (Mt,18). And I always make the same prayer to the Father as you: 'Give what you command, and command whatever you wish'. How sweet is the will of our Lord: our whole happiness consists in fulfilling it! It is something so sublime, so far surpassing, in its wisdom and goodness, our powers of seeing and feeling, that we cannot seize it by the power of our mind or fulfil it with the strength of our will: it only remains for us to bow down and pray that he will give us the light to see it, strengthen us by his life in us, and accomplish his will in us himself by infusing into us his own efficacy. In this way we must truly be children, as our Master taught us, and so enter the kingdom of heaven - which is the realm of those who are humble, who have no will of their own, but whose will is the will of God. It is in this nothingness of ours that we can hope against hope; since the greatness of God shows itself in those who are nothing, and his will is revealed and fulfilled in those who have abandoned their own will because they want only to do the will of God himself. I certainly find that God gives me greater confidence when I am most feeble in body and soul, for then I see there is all the greater scope for the greatness of God's love to show itself. It seems to me that it is precisely when we are at our weakest that we ought to ask for *even greater things*, since the Lord to whom we put our petitions is infinite, and our wretchedness, far from putting limits to his goodness, instead augments even further the extent of his glory.

So let us take it as certain, my dear brother, that when we say: 'THY WILL BE DONE', desiring only that God should dispose of us without limits, and making sure that our motives look solely to *our greater moral perfection* (which is for us the only absolute good), the will of God then will be done in us in a far greater way than, left to ourselves, we could conceive or dare to hope. *Holiness, the desire for holiness*, will follow; God's designs will be accomplished. The law of God has a hidden power: it is most simple yet at the same time infinitely fruitful; his Providence is entirely directed to the good of those who delight in God's law, and who put all their hope in him, not in their own plans. The Church's one hope and desire is *holiness*, to which everything else is subordinated. Man's part consists in studying how to amend himself and attain justice and holiness. After that, God will do the rest: he will choose those whom he deigns to use for the good of the Church: he will send them forth; he will guide them, he will help them. Blessed, then, are those who do not go forth of their own accord, but are sent! Everything necessary, then, is summed up in setting due store by our own perfection, and making this the basis of our trust. 'This is the will of God, your sanctification.'

Accept the expression of my esteem and Christian friendship, as also that of all my dear brethren, and pray for -

Your affectionate servant in Christ,
A. R. p.

Henri de Bonnechose was later consecrated a bishop, and then by Pope Pius IX made a cardinal.

75. To the Marchioness Adele Benso Cavour in Turin

Stresa, 21 August 1842

My dear and esteemed Marchioness,

The sad news of our loss of the Countess d'Auzer, so good, so loveable, so edifying in life, is all the more painful to me because it came so unexpectedly. I had heard from Gustavo, when he paid a short visit here, that her fever had returned; but this was said to be fortuitous, and I was already assured that she was on the mend. But the Lord disposed otherwise. He is good, even when he chastises us. And it truly seems to me that we can say that the Master came into his garden and plucked the fruit when he saw that it was ripe. He wished to use it to deck the table of his heavenly banquet. To us who knew her and were in constant contact with her, and especially to her inseparable sisters and all the relatives who found her so loveable and were so attached to her, this is indeed a painful parting. My dear lady, believe me when I say that I not only understand your sorrow but feel it in the depths of my heart. During the time when I was in Turin and was so kindly received in the Cavour household, I had so many proofs of the goodness and purity of that soul; I received such good example from her, and felt such deep esteem for her on account of her religious warmth, her candour, her insatiable desire to hear one speak of the things of God, the uprightness of her intentions, and - in short - her solid virtue, that the news you give me of her passing pierces my heart. The fact that this good lady has left us for ever makes me share in your own sorrow and in that of the Duchess of Tonner and of your whole family, of which she had become so precious a part.

Simply as a result of these reflections, I can well see that the same excellent qualities of the one we have lost, qualities which make us regret and lament her loss all the more, must at the same time alleviate our sorrow and afford us spiritual consolation. So many who see their relatives die, even when these enjoyed great prosperity in human terms, lack this solid reason for consolation; and without this, nothing else counts for much. And it is from reflecting on these lines, my dear Countess, that I believe we can find the true solace that you ask of me in your letter. By the grace of God we have many reasons for believing that your sister now finds herself in a much happier state than

before. We may no longer be able to find her in that room of hers where we passed so many pleasant hours in her company; but instead we have reason to contemplate her in the bliss of heaven. Yes, that virtuous lady has crossed the great divide; she has completed the laboursome voyage, with its dangers, its risk of shipwreck, and arrived at the shore: she has entered the harbour. And with her she has taken the true faith with which God endowed her when he led her into the Catholic Church, giving her a pledge of the salvation she was destined for. She left behind her a spotless life, one that had been long tested and purified in the crucible of suffering. When the gold has been completely purified by the fire, the artist pours it into the mould and founds a precious statue, as an ornament for the king's dwelling. In like manner, we have good reason to hope, the King of heaven has already made of our Countess a beautiful ornament for his Paradise. We must not let ourselves be deceived by the flesh: it is true that the moment of death is painful. But it is only a moment, and for the Countess that moment has passed. Those who in this life have not loved their Creator have reason to fear what will happen to them after death. But those who loved God, those who lived upright lives, as our Countess did, those who lived by faith and with a lively hope in the divine mercy - for those as fortunate as this, what does death amount to? It is a moment of merit, a precious sigh; and then all suffering is ended for ever: salvation is assured, and eternal joy begins. This joy is perfect; we can form no adequate idea of it. Even if we were to combine in our imagination all the pleasures and satisfactions that this life offers, all the honours and grandeurs, all treasures - in a word, everything that is desirable - we should have only a quite imperfect notion of that bliss which in itself would set the human heart on fire with desire and longing. So when our human nature feels itself weighed down by grief, we must allow it an outlet, my dear Marchioness; but then we must enter into ourselves, and within our souls, in which holy baptism has infused faith, we shall find in this divine light great solace, great consolation. Oh, how the light of faith changes the way we see things! Supernatural truth transforms evils that are intolerable to nature into sources of unspeakable happiness!

So let us face up to reality, and subdue to some extent our blind nature, and instead silently look to see, by the light of faith, how it is with the beloved person we have lost. Shall we find her grieving and sorrowful over leaving this earth? No: she calls herself most fortunate; she blesses that precious moment when she left this vale of tears and broke the fetters of flesh which prevented her from fully rejoicing in her God; when she left for ever all spiritual struggles, all bodily suffering. Now she looks down in pity on us whom she sees still in exile, and smiles to see us in our simplicity feeling pity for her in her happiness, shedding bitter tears and lamenting over her, when she enjoys such blessings. She does not reject our love, but she wishes she could share with us some of her own. She would like to communicate to us something of the light of the intellect by which she can assess the true worth of things; she would like our minds and hearts to go beyond the limitations of this world of the senses, and rise on the wings of the spirit to her, to her glory, to her triumph; and it is her wish that up there, instead of

exclaiming in grief, weighed down by sorrow, we could share in her joy and her kingdom, which is that of God himself.

This is what our good lady hopes for us, now that she has been raised to the dignity of a queen, a heavenly queen. For this is the lot of all the elect in paradise. So let us impose a salutary brake on our human sensibilities and say to ourselves: just as it would be strange for one sister to lament over another at seeing her chosen as the bride of a king, so too it would be even stranger if we should mourn over the happy lot of a soul whom we have reason to believe to be the chosen spouse of his divine majesty.

It is true that we have to realize that, since the kingdom of heaven cannot allow entry to anything that still shows the slightest sign of earthliness, the least stain or shadow of sin, and that since human frailty is so great, we have to fear that even in the souls which appear to us the most spotless, when they leave this life there remain some imperfections to be cleansed in purgatory. So the great esteem which we have for the dear departed does not make us any the less anxious to go to their aid with our sacrifices and prayers; and for my part I said Mass this morning for your sister, and have got others to pray for her. Yet these same suffrages which draw their efficacy from the blood of Christ, whose merits are infinite, are for us a fresh motive for consolation, when we think that the good God has been pleased to help us in this way, as a proof of the tender love he has for his weak creatures. At the same time we can reflect that the souls in purgatory, though they suffer, do so willingly; they would not wish to return to this earth, and they are truly happy in their hope, honoured by the angels for their holiness, full of the dignity they have as spouses of Christ. Their glorious destination is assured for all eternity; it is only a matter of a brief interval before the desired moment comes when the divine Spouse will come and introduce them, all shining and beautiful, to the bridal chamber and his embrace. So let us enter into the feelings of our loved one whom we do wrong to mourn over; and then the scene will change: we shall weep tears of joy over her happiness rather than tears of sorrow for our own loss. This will furnish proof that we have for her true love - that is, a spiritual and sublime love, more dear to her than our natural love. From now on she wishes nothing for us but our true good, and she rejoices simply at seeing us carry out acts of virtue, of resignation, of fortitude, of perfect conformity to the divine will, of thanksgiving to God, who in all things is equally good, and who disposes everything with the same infinite love for us.

So if we take this happening, grievous as it is to our heart of flesh, as an opportunity given to us by our Lord and an intimation that we must disengage ourselves ever more from earthly things and give our love to and prepare for the things of heaven, how happy we shall make the one who has gone before us on this great journey! She asks nothing more from us, expects nothing else, asks for nothing else. Moreover this is what she asks for us from her heavenly Spouse.

If after all this, after all these reflections, we still feel that down here there is an emptiness we find hard to fill; if from time to time, without noticing it, our hearts and our gaze search for the well-known face, the dear words, the accustomed presence, of

the one who has been taken from us; if the memory of her unexpectedly comes to our minds as if to say she is no longer here, that we shall never see her again in this life; and if this thought brings the departed one to us as she was in life, only to snatch her away once more; if this imagination which shows to us as still living and speaking the one with whom we were accustomed to spend so many hours, only to dissipate at once this sweet illusion - this, I say, may pierce our hearts and bring involuntary tears to our eyes. But what of it? Let us not be disturbed. It will not make our resignation less perfect, or lessen our conformity to the will of God. As long as we live in this world we are, unfortunately, two beings in one: and these two, the flesh and the spirit, fight one another. But battle leads to victory; and victory leads to the crown. It is prayer, my dear Marchioness, which brings about the victory of the spirit. And time, too, heals the deepest wounds that the flesh suffers.

I am glad that our good Father Molinari was in Turin at this time, and was able to do something by his words to console those many people who were afflicted by this sad loss. He has a most tender heart, and he is full of that charity which is better than any healing balm on such an occasion.

I can imagine too the grief of my dear friend, the Marquis Gustavo, especially when he rejoined the family. I was unfortunate this year not to have been able to have him with me at Stresa for a while as I would have liked, and as I hoped. Now I shall have to leave at the beginning of September for Bergamo, where I am due to give a retreat to the clergy there; and I shall not be able to go to Turin; nor can I hope to see the Marquis again at Stresa this autumn, as I foresee that in October he will as usual go into the country.

I beg you, my dear lady, to give my regards to the good Marquis, to the Marchioness your mother, to the Duchess and the children; and to convey to them my human feelings of condolence over their bereavement and to offer them also that spiritual consolation by which in this letter I have tried to mitigate both your and my own grief.

With deepest respect, my dear Marchioness, I remain -

Your humble and devoted servant,

A. R.

76. To the cleric Enrico Fehr at the Sagra di San Michele

Stresa, 24 August 1842

My dear Enrico,

Yes, you are to begin your theological studies; but only by way of a trial; and I reserve to myself the decision over what will be for your greater spiritual benefit, aware as I am of your wish to attain to perfect love of God. I am sorry that you were unable to finish

your noviciate (though you will later be able to make this up), because this is the most important course of study - the study of virtue. If you always keep before your mind the end to which your vocation calls you, the end which is at the same time so simple and so sublime, you will be able during your studies to make progress in overcoming yourself and becoming a docile and tractable instrument in the hands of God your Creator. You will attain this if you take care to conform your conduct to the following rules.

1. Repress in yourself any thought or feeling of vanity and self-complacency, and foster sentiments of humility and self-contempt.

2. Refrain from any talk showing vanity or self-esteem.

3. Sincerely show by your behaviour that you are always full of humility and charity towards all your brethren, genuinely wishing to serve them in everything never wanting to be served yourself; and be of one mind with them in all things.

4. Avoid arguments and animated disputations; speak only very diffidently about yourself; practise simplicity, gentleness and deference towards the truth and to the authority of others.

5. Do not expect or ask for any privileges or dispensations from the common life, on whatever pretext, but fit in contentedly with what all the others do.

6. Take care to be sincere, without exaggerating in order to flatter others, or for any other human motive.

7. Have a sincere desire for Superiors to know your defects, rather than your merits.

My dear Enrico, this is the way to preserve and increase the good results of the retreat you have just made. You will make great progress if you imitate our Lord, and pay heed to those seven simple maxims. Pray, as I very much hope you do, for -

Your affectionate father in Christ,

A. ROSMINI p.

77. To Caterina Rosmini at Trent

Rovereto, 12 October 1842

My dear cousin,

I was very pleased to read in your letter of the dispositions you reveal, and I hope they come from God. The vocation which seemingly you feel to the perfect life is something very precious, and I urge you to cultivate it with all care and attention, protecting it by practising holy mortification, as lilies are protected with a hedge of thorns. If the divine mercy should destine you to serve God in your neighbour by making an entire sacrifice of yourself within the *Sisters of Providence* (as you hint you may), that would give me great pleasure, in view of the perfect virtue at which the Sisters aim. But it is a matter over which you need to pray earnestly to God, so as to assure yourself that the call really

comes from him. Take into account that we are talking about an Institute which is perhaps the humblest and least of all; and you are thinking of becoming one of the Sisters who are pleased to name themselves (as their Constitutions call them) *the poor servants of the servants of the poor*. You must remember that being a Sister of Providence is the same as being the lowliest of all women on this earth. Their only wish is to love and to suffer in order to serve God in their neighbour, and in this way obey *the precept of the Lord*.

For the rest, I have two pieces of advice for you now. First, tell your father all your secret thoughts: I have no doubt that he will give you wise guidance. And the second is that while you remain with your family you make every effort to obey and serve your good parents in all things. Be always diligent, and act with an upright intention, in a simple, spontaneous way. Try to exercise the domestic virtues that are needed in any state of life, especially those connected with charity towards one's neighbour. Combine interior union with God and external activity, asking for the grace to do this. Use every opportunity for self-denial, even where practices of piety are concerned. For mortification and self-abnegation are the best ways of pleasing God.

You sign yourself 'Nina of Jesus', and that is a most beautiful name. If you wish to act as such, carry in your heart the image of the Jesus to whom you wish to belong entirely. Let the eyes of your soul be constantly fixed on that image, so as to imitate it and impress it on all that you do. Let him be your model in all your actions. You can see how gentle Jesus was, how kind, how much he did, and at the same time how much he prayed. He will certainly grant you the grace to imitate him and to be really his Nina.

Please do remember me in your prayers; and when you want to write to me, send the letters to Salvadori, who will pass them on to me.

Yours affectionately in Christ,
R. p.

Caterina Rosmini was the daughter of Leonardo, who practised as a lawyer in Trent. Salvadori was the administrator in Rovereto of the property Rosmini had inherited from his father.

78. To Michele Parma at Asti

Rovereto, 12 October 1842

Dear Sir,

I cannot say how consoled I was to receive your letter of 4 October, which arrived only today. I thank from my heart the merciful God who has done the great things for the good of your soul that you tell me about. Since he has so lovingly drawn you to himself, I do not doubt that he will give you greater strength to enable you to walk in the path of humility that was taught and followed by Jesus Christ, until he leads you to become one

of those little children of whom he said *of such is the kingdom of heaven*. Yes, he will make you want to become small, and one of those who are unknown and even despised - for this is what is greatly loved by a faithful servant and follower of the Lord. I greatly hope, my dear Michele, that God will make you one of those *poor in spirit* whom Christ calls *blessed*. There is no way to obtain this grace other than prayer, while at the same time you make every effort to renounce yourself and the world which is so illusory.

You wish to know what are the rules of the Institute of Charity. To show you at least in what its spirit consists, let me say that in fact it has as its basis that *poverty of spirit* and humility which I have mentioned above, together with a renunciation of all human praise. It is this alone which makes possible a sincere love of God and of our neighbour. Its foundation is the belief that there is only one good - the *eternal salvation* of our soul and its *moral perfection*. From this it follows that the Institute has no other end than the achieving of this unique good: in other words, this means the full possession of God; and all that the Institute does is carried out solely in view of an end which is quite simple and wholly supernatural - and so is often ignored and despised by men. But moral perfection cannot be achieved except according to the divine will. Hence all the members of the Institute of Charity resolve, even in difficult matters, to conform to the will of God as known through *perfect obedience* to Superiors who, in the name of God (who has said *he who hears you hears me*) decide in detail what each one should do. So each member, sacrificing his own will entirely to the will and pleasure of God, must carry out with indifference everything that Superiors give him to do. The aim of Superiors is always that those in their charge and they themselves should act out of pure love for God and their neighbour, carrying out as perfectly as possible *the precept of the Lord* in all things.

His commandment is concerned with love of our neighbour, in whom we must love God. So any and all works of charity towards our neighbour are undertaken by the Institute, whenever Superiors judge that they are according to God's will. Therefore each member must be ready and willing to exercise any work of charity, even when it is difficult or repugnant to his own inclination, with a lively faith in God, who will never abandon him when he hears and obeys his voice in that of Superiors.

So the most comprehensive account of the Institute of Charity is summed up as a complete sacrifice of the individual to God, as expressed in universal charity towards our neighbour. And for its manual or text it takes Jesus Christ, crucified for the love of men and in obedience to his eternal Father. All its rules are aimed at attaining this most simple end.

As regards its organization, you will be able to form an idea of this from the extract from the Apostolic Letters published in the *Ami de la Religion*

My dear Signor Parma, I congratulate you once more on the grace you have been given: I thank God for it and rejoice over it. Do please remember me in your prayers, and believe me to be -

Your most humble and affectionate servant,

The reference is to the Apostolic Letters *In sublimi* with which Pope Gregory XVI on 20 September 1839 gave formal approval to the Institute of Charity.

79, To Don Giuseppe Gagliardi in Domodossola

Stresa, 5 November 1842

My dear brother in Christ,

I was very pleased to hear that the love of our Lord is increasing among the brethren there. Oh, may it become perfect! Devote yourself to bringing this about, with your kindness, your example, your constant exhortations. Never forget the words of Common Rule No. 20 - *let nothing opposed [to charity] be allowed*. Rather, keep strictly to this rule.

As regards what you say about Ferraris, I should like to make this comment: not every wish to please Superiors is to be repressed, because it can lead to a desire to please God. And moreover it is an incentive which helps a man to do good, as long as it does not become an exclusive and over-dominant motive, for this would be a grave fault. In general, then, any natural instincts that lead to virtue, as long as they are controlled and subordinated to the main end, are not to be suppressed among the brethren, but rather it is well to ignore them and go on to speak generally of the importance of a pure motive. This will lead the brethren gradually to relinquish the other motivations as grace grows in their souls.

I send affectionate greetings in the Lord to you and to our other brethren there, along with all our Ascribed Members. May God bless you all.

Yours,
R.

80. To Father Moses Furlong at the Sagra di San Michele

Stresa, 8 November 1842

My dear brother in Christ,

Your short letters were most welcome to me and Hutton. I am quite confident that the Lord will grant you abundant graces in your solitude there, and that Michael the Archangel, the protector of the universal Church, will help you, guard you and intercede for you with God, so that the flame of charity may grow ever greater on the altar of your heart - the flame of that universal charity to which Jesus Christ in his infinite mercy has

called you. The theological studies on which you are beginning will greatly help you to advance more and more in the knowledge of God, strengthening your love of him and of your neighbour whom henceforth you must serve with generosity. Be very appreciative of your Superiors, Molinari and Paoli: you will find in them ever greater treasures of charity as faithful servants of God, men who are capable (as far as human weakness allows) of interpreting for you the decrees of his adorable will.

Greet for me all the other beloved brethren there, and pray for the needs of -

Your humble but affectionate father,

A. ROSMINI

Provost (however unworthy) of the Institute of Charity

81. To Don G. B. Pagani in England

Stresa, from the noviciate, 17 November 1842

My dear brother in Jesus Christ. May his Spirit be always in our hearts. Amen.

I have received your two letters, from Lyons and from London, and I have thanked the Lord and your Guardian Angel for having led you safely to your journey's end.

I come first to what you say about the faculty of receiving people into the Institute. I can assure you that I have no wish to receive new members so as to augment our numbers. I am perfectly happy with the small number of those whom the Lord sends us, and I see in this proof of his wisdom and goodness: I adore him and rejoice. So I will explain to you the maxims which guide me in this matter, and which accord with our *Constitutions*.

I make a distinction between receiving into one of our houses (on the one hand) and promoting to the various grades those whom we receive (on the other). As for simply accepting applicants: I receive all those who ask for this and who show me that there is some hope that they will succeed. And this hope is provided by all those who in the First Probation declare and promise that they mean to practise what is contained in the *Maxims* and the *Memorial of the First Probation*., unless I have some *positive* reason to judge to the contrary. The reasons for which I so easily admit people are these:

1. I am very much afraid of making rash judgements concerning my brethren, and so I am inclined to think well of them. Therefore, rather than failing to give them the benefit of the doubt, I deliberately expose myself to the possibility of being deceived, incurring expense, and meeting with problems. I have never regretted acting in this way; and it has brought me much peace of mind and interior consolation. The Lord has never once allowed the mistaken judgements I have made to have ill consequences.

2. This practice seems to me a way of imitating the kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, who said: *I will not send away anyone who comes to me*. These are the words

which our Constitutions put before us; and they are also quoted in this connection by the most outstanding rules of the holy founders of religious institutes. It is true that many come to us with their feet rather than with their hearts; but I cannot decide that this was the case with them until I have positive proof of it. Again, I consider the coming of one of Christ's faithful to us under two aspects. First as sent so that he may perhaps become a member of the Institute; and then, as sent so that the Institute can show him charity. Because the spirit of the Institute makes it wish to welcome (provided it can) every opportunity to exercise charity that Providence provides. And this, I say, is one such. So we accept this follower of Christ, and we use towards him all possible charity, for the benefit of his body and mind. The Lord will look favourably on us when we act like this; and the Institute will reap not harm but profit from such good deeds. The brother who came to us will meanwhile hear the word of God; and even if he does not end up by being one of our members, he will take away a seed which will perhaps one day bear fruit in his heart.

3. Although the Institute is far from seeking anything of its own accord, it is equally bent on being anxious and attentive not to neglect any slightest opportunity for good that God's bounty affords it, or to go against the indications of divine Providence. Rather, it does not spare itself in following them. Now, if I send away an aspirant without being certain that he lacks a vocation, surely I expose myself to the danger of refusing a gift which God in his goodness wished to make to me? One of the signs of Providence is a request made by our neighbour. So if a brother of mine asks me for something, and I have no positive reasons for refusing him, I must not only welcome him but patiently and lovingly exert myself on his behalf, and continue to do so until I am convinced that he cannot successfully become a member of the Institute. Only then shall I be justified before God if I send him away. Indeed I must do so at once. But if the Institute does not do everything in its power, with persevering patience, to form this applicant - teaching him, training him, testing him - surely it must always fear that by its own conduct it has deprived itself of a member that God perhaps wished to give it - but to give only on condition that we earn this through our efforts, our prayers for this individual before the throne of God? Let us be convinced that God does not want us to expect from him fine things ready made, but rather that we should gain them through our hard work - which he is ready to bless as long as we spend our labour with lively trust in him alone. We must never neglect through laziness on our part anything he offers. *Do not let your share of good things pass you by*, as scripture says.

I should like these maxims to be followed faithfully by every Superior who has the faculty of receiving aspirants. They come from the Constitutions. It is simply a matter of applying them. The results will vary with the circumstances: but the maxims remain unchanged. For example, one Superior may be more enlightened by God than another when it comes to deciding quickly who has a vocation and who has not; and in such a case, because he has greater light, he will also be able the more readily to decide either not to accept an applicant or to send away someone he judges unsuitable. But

Superiors need to be wary of themselves in this matter and not base decisions on what may be suggested by their imaginations - for imagination is the mother of rash judgements. It is safer to rely on positive intellectual grounds, and refer also to consultors. I myself always do this when possible, because I feel the need for it.

There is another variation in the way these maxims may need to be applied, because of external circumstances. If these indicate that to receive an aspirant of doubtful promise would be too great a burden and bring harm to the Institute - as would be the case in England, where we lack the resources to exercise spiritual and corporal charity towards someone little likely to be a suitable member, we must certainly restrict ourselves to receiving only those who seem to be the best candidates, those with a more evident vocation.

There is another comment, one I forgot to make, concerning what you say about the intellectual and other gifts we should like to see in our members. The true end of the Institute (which we must never lose sight of) is holiness. We must take little account of everything else; and we ought to have a special tenderness for those of our brethren who are poor, disabled physically, or even mentally. I can assure you that I have just as great an affection for the simplest and most uncultured of our brethren, provided that he is good and holy, as for the most learned, or one of noble family, possessed of brilliant gifts in the sight of the world. And I prefer the former, when I call to mind the love which Jesus Christ had for the poor and the despised.. So I think we should receive all men of good will into the Institute. It is true that the more greatly the brethren are endowed with good understanding and other qualities, the more good they will be able to do to their neighbour (as long as they are holy), and the better they will be able to help the progress of the Institute. But I am quite content that we should do as much good to our neighbour as is in our power - and let the Institute make what progress it can. Let us welcome all the means, all the talents and gifts, that God gives us; but let us not ask for more. At the same time let us not refuse anyone. And once we have gathered these talents, with great care to lose none of them, let us all 'trade' with them with the greatest possible fidelity and diligence. All gifts are gladly received in the Institute, even the smallest and least impressive; because we refuse no work of charity. Someone who is not up to preaching may make a good infirmarian; and a man who has not the skill to treat of affairs, or the learning to write books, may be most useful as a school teacher, even if it just to teach the ABC.

I come now to your second point, the rules I follow when it comes to promoting aspirants to further grades. While I feel we ought to make it easy for applicants to be received, at the same time I think it just as necessary to be strict over promoting them to higher grades. So as I never refuse anyone without having *positive* reasons for this, I judge it absolutely necessary to have good reasons and *positive* proof that a member has the required qualities for a grade before I promote him to it. And if he shows *positive* proof that he has no vocation, I do not delay for a moment to dismiss him, once I have been able to base a prudent judgement on the showing he has made. If he has not given

positive evidence one way or the other, I wait patiently, meanwhile making sure that we do him the charity of teaching him and motivating him until such time as I am able to resolve the matter. We have in the past kept people in the house for long periods without their being admitted to the noviciate.

The testing period though which our members have to pass is very long, as you know, and this is so that we have time to get to know them. And they can be sent away at any time. It seems to me that when we act like this there is no need to fear the harms you are afraid of. And even though this procedure involves some inconveniences and minor harm, we must remember that according to gospel simplicity and perfection it is not a good principle to wish to avoid all inconvenience and every disadvantage. That would smack of a too-human attitude. If we are patient and long-suffering our Lord will look after us.

In saying these things to you I do not mean to justify everything that has been done in the past, but simply to explain the maxims which generally speaking I have followed, and which I can follow more completely in future. In the early days of an institute there are bound to be unforeseen difficulties.

So let us commit the Institute to God, and then go ahead with simplicity and courage. I greet warmly and bless you all, and in the heart of Jesus I am -

Yours affectionately,
A. R.

82. To Caterina Rosmini in Trent

Stresa, 26 November 1842

My dear cousin,

From the sentiments you express in your letter and the conviction that God inspires in you that you must consecrate yourself wholly to him in the service of your neighbour, I conclude unhesitatingly that, as you say, you have a vocation to the Institute of Providence. These Sisters do just what you yourself propose to do: they entirely renounce the world and all its attractions, and make a total sacrifice of themselves in order to serve Jesus Christ, the Spouse of their souls, in their neighbour, for whose eternal salvation they have a special care. Deep humility, continual self-denial, perfect obedience, ardent charity, the endeavour to imitate in all things their divine Master - it is to these things that all their rules can be reduced. No work of charity is alien to their Institute; but what they give particular care to at present is the education of girls, whether rich or poor, in towns or in the countryside, wherever divine Providence wishes them to be. They are pleased to be called *the poor servants of the servants of the poor*. They profess poverty so as to imitate Christ in this too; they make the three vows, at first

annually (after the noviciate), then every three years, and finally perpetually, if Superiors allow this.

If then this is the way to which you feel yourself called, take courage. The Lord never fails to help always those who choose him as their only good, their Lord and Master, their model and their Spouse. Offer up your prayers to him: ask him for the grace to be able to perfect your sacrifice, in imitation of him, on the holy cross of religious life, nailed to it by the three sacred vows; and then leave everything to him. He will certainly listen to your prayers; he will smooth the way for you; you will be consoled. When will that be? Only he knows that. Your part is simply to desire, to pray, to send up your sighs to him day and night, in resignation and tranquillity. He has given you a good father on earth - one who can also be your spiritual father. That is surely a great grace! So open your heart completely to your father. Once you have given him proof of your solid virtue; once he is convinced that what you have is not just a passing feeling of fervour but a true vocation from God, I am sure that you will no longer need any mediation from me. He will of his own accord bring you to me, and I will receive you among the poor servants and joyful brides of the Lord. Be submissive, then, and prepare for the great step. This you must do with mature consideration, with prayer and love, practising every virtue. I know that you will do this, and so I have no doubts about a happy outcome. Most holy Mary, to whom the Sisters of Providence are so devoted, will welcome you into her family. I will ask others to pray for this intention. Greet from me your mother and father, and pray, too, for me -

Your humble and affectionate cousin.

A. R.

83. To Don Giuseppe Galgliardi at Domodossola

Stresa, 20 December 1842

My dear brother in Christ and companion in his holy service,

We have guard ourselves carefully against wronging God by not trusting to his infinite goodness and mercy, which overcomes all the obstacles to his abundant graces which we create by our shortcomings and sins. He will do this if we HOPE and PRAY. Oh, how beautiful is the hope that comes from the Lord, and never deceives anyone; and how powerful is prayer. I do not want you to let the enemy close up your heart, when God rather wishes us to be great and generous of heart. *I ran in the way of your commandments, for you enlarged my heart.* So what I chiefly urge on you is to be more large-hearted. We are sinful, but God is infinitely good. How little we stop to think about that word, 'infinitely'. If we did, all our fears would vanish: we should be confident of victory over all our enemies. We would say: *If an army should rise up against me, even then would I trust.* So we must not let ourselves be deceived by the

enemy, who sometimes makes our hearts sad, causing us distress which appears under the guide of compunction for our sins. No, our compunction must always be combined with unlimited hope, because this is something reasonable, and because God delights to see this in his creatures. We must always beware of putting our trust in ourselves! But as for God - we must never tire of saying: *In thee, Lord, have I put my trust; let me never be confounded*, and of thanking him: *For you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety*. One who hopes is strong, and can do all things. Hope is an unshakeable anchor; it is our invincible weapon.

Greet for me all our dear brethren. May the infant Jesus give to your hearts a great increase of love.

Yours,
R.

84. To Canon Paolo Bertolozzi at Lucca

Stresa, 22 December 1842

My dear and faithful friend in the Lord,

Our Institute professes great veneration for and submission to the bishops of the Church (as is its duty), for they are appointed by the Holy Spirit to govern it. Indeed the Institute is entirely dedicated to their service. And this is why whenever it is to be introduced into a diocese we must always have the prior blessing of the Bishop. This is also necessary when the association of the Ascribed is to be set up in a formal and ordered way. If someone wants to be ascribed simply as an act of private devotion, then in such a case it is enough to have the presumed consent of the Ordinary, since here it is a question of a purely private act of devotion (which moreover has the approval of the Supreme Vicar of Jesus Christ). But when it is a matter of giving formal shape to such a pious society then, as I said, it is essential to have the consent of the Bishop. So I was very pleased to receive your generous offer to act in this connection, and I accept it, asking you to take on the task of obtaining the blessing of your very zealous Archbishop. That will be for me a sure sign of God's will; and with this seal on the enterprise you will be able to go ahead with good hopes of success, to the honour and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ and of his Mother, who is our particular Queen, and as a help to our neighbour whom we wish to serve in charity. So kindly take this step, (or if you think fit, get someone else to do so), so as to prepare for the Archbishop a brief request to which he may be good enough to signify his approval. Meanwhile we must not omit to pray over this endeavour. It is with prayer that we begin every new work, and it is in prayer that we repose all our hopes. Confer over the matter if you like with Father Bini, and give him my respects.

Yours affectionately in the Lord,

A. ROSMINI p.

85. To Don Giovanni Padulli in Milan

Stresa, 24 December 1842

My dear friend,

Before I go away to make my retreat, as I intend to do soon, I want to set my mind at rest by giving you my heartfelt thanks for your Christmas greetings, and send you my own sincere best wishes for the feast. May Jesus, at his birth into this world, grant you heavenly blessings and graces, and give them also to those who are most dear to you, among whom our good Raffaello and his growing family hold a high place. At the same time I ask you to obtain for me from the divine Child by your prayers all that I shall need in these coming ten days, in which I shall speak with God alone about my eternal salvation; and it is by him alone that I hope to be healed, like the poor leper. I am awaiting my resurrection like Lazarus in the tomb. Mary, the Mother of the divine Child and my Mother, must be my advocate and mediatrix, as she has always been since I was a child; so plead with her also for me. Obtain for me also the help of the prayers of all our friends and brethren in the Lord, foremost among whom are our good Don Giulio and Count Mellerio.

In haste. I am all yours in the heart of Jesus.

A. ROSMINI p.

86. To Giuseppe Pelucchini, Gian Battista Diehl and Pietro Caire at Domodossola

Stresa, 26 December 1842

. . . I appreciate your letters, your affectionate greetings and your good wishes. May heaven reward you for them.

Pietro asks me to write something for his spiritual benefit, but I wish to write to you all together, because I want you to be of one heart and one soul. My message, then, is this: 'study so as to be thoroughly aware of your state and to fulfil its obligations courageously.' What is your state? You have gone on from the *noviciate* to the *scholasticate*. The noviciate is the school of the affections and the virtues; and those who go on to studies do not cease to be novices, but they become also *scholastics*. This means that they have to continue to study to attain love and holy fervour, and the practice of the gospel virtues; but they must also apply these virtues and that fervour to the study they are engaged in of letters and the various branches of knowledge. So just as during the noviciate it was very meritorious to be obedient over *not* studying, now

your virtue lies in studying *out of obedience*. It is God's will that you should study. So you must spare no effort, no exertion, so as to profit to the utmost from the knowledge your courses offer. Moreover you must be ready to abandon study as soon as God requires this of you through your Superiors. But while he does ask study of you, your perfection consists in excelling at those studies. You are working for God: so diligence in your studies is the proof God asks from you of your love for him. So your motives for studying are both obedience and love of God. But you must also study for the love of others - your neighbour.

You will understand what I mean if you have grasped what are the principles of the Institute. It undertakes no external works of its own accord; but should God through his Providence call it to take up any work of charity, however difficult, however demanding, it does so most willingly and energetically. And if we want to do all sorts of great things for the world when God calls us, what does this oblige us to do? To prepare ourselves for anything. And how can we do this? By developing our abilities and increasing our knowledge to the utmost. Those who have more skills and knowledge can accomplish more. So now is the time, my dear sons, to provide yourselves with the weapons you will need, so that at a sign from God you will be soldiers ready to fight. How could we have a sincere wish to help our neighbour, to devote ourselves to remedying all human ills, to serving God in all sorts of works for his glory, if when we had the opportunity to equip ourselves with the necessary means for this we were idle, listless, sleepy, inattentive, slack? We certainly could not. So all the members of our Institute, whatever their grade and condition, have to be as active and energetic as possible, and try to acquire every good gift and quality: first the interior qualities of purity of soul and holiness, and then the external skills in the arts, in teaching - in short, in all good things. For all branches of knowledge, all kinds of skill can be most valuable means for exercising every sort of charity. So this is the way that opens before you: follow it like stout-hearted men, so that your conscience will witness that you have used all the powers that God has given you so as to correspond with the obligations of the lofty state in which, of his mercy, he has placed you. My dear sons, this is the way to be happy in the Lord; and your Superiors too will be full of joy - and especially the one who loves you best of all with the love of a father -

Your Father General,
ROSMINI

87. To Professor Piantoni at Monza

Stresa, December 1842

Reverend Father,

You honour me more than I deserve with your questions. I shall not be able to tell you anything more than you already know; but still, to obey your urging, I will say that in my opinion the most important thing to be aimed at by anyone who preaches to boys is this: to give them a proper understanding of religion, which is only really attractive and loveable when its nature is thoroughly grasped. And to this end, it is more vital than people realize that the teacher of religious instruction should first of all himself study the subject profoundly. This clearly is no small undertaking, since we are dealing with a vast complex of ideas: dogmas that are mysteries, and commandments that are lofty in their scope.

Perhaps my little book called *Catechetics* may afford you some ideas. But since (I gather) you have to explain the gospel, you will not be able to follow a connected line of ideas. So each topic will have to be treated as something in itself; and all you can aim at is to make your teaching very clear and very simple. Great clarity and simplicity of style has its own appeal for the affections; and there can be no greater example of these qualities than is to be found in the gospel. There we find few ideas at any one time, but ideas that are sublime; just a few sentiments, but most generous ones. And how readily the hearts of the young respond to the appeal of all this! To know the truth is to love it; to see virtue is to choose it. But often the truth is too dressed up, and in trying too hard to explain it, we can obscure it. Also the real nature of virtue can be distorted by making too many human distinctions; and the result is that in the hope of making it acceptable, we diminish it. Yet an innocent soul would rather take wings and fly than creep along the ground. If we can manage to instil a lofty and noble sentiment into a boy's heart, we can be sure of good results. So it is a big mistake to try to sugar over the austerity of virtue and to bring it down from the heights. If it is robbed of its true excellence, it no longer arouses a holy enthusiasm; if it is deprived of its majestic nature; it no longer excites admiration or attracts man to itself - for he is created for the infinite. I should like young people to be spoken to in such a way as to call them to be heroes. This does not require a pompous, inflated, emotional style. This would have a negative effect. What is truly great and excellent must reside in the things themselves, not in mere words. People do not sufficiently study the most important gift which the speaker must have; and in our case it is clarity - clarity in the presentation, clarity of thought, clarity of order. If anyone is to acquire this ability, which seems so easy, he must work very hard; the effort involves meditation, trial and error, perseverance. He must have in mind a model of perfection, and in his heart the determination to attain this.

Writings intended for the young abound; and many of them are good. I would find it difficult to point out any that you do not already know. And you will certainly know the little book entitled *Gioventù dabbene* [roughly, 'Young people as they ought to be'], published by Pogliano in Milan. Its six chapters do have the beginnings of the kind of thing I mean, but it is far from perfect.

For the rest, as I said, I can do no more than say things that you already know, and which in any case can hardly be contained in a short letter.

Please give my warm greetings to Fathers Villoresi and Dalla Via, and my respects to the Father Rector of the College. Remember me in your prayers.

I am very pleased to hear that those two fine young fellows, Dandolo and Gazzola, are doing so well. Although I do not know them personally, I am beginning to feel an affection for them from what you tell me.

With deep affection and esteem, I remain -

Your most humble servant in Christ,

A. R. p.

88. To Don Giacomo Molinari in Turin

Stresa, 4 January 1843

My dear brother in Christ,

I made you promise Canon Angelo more than once that if the thing is not feasible, no one at all (apart from him) was to know about the offer that I made. So now tell him the true state of affairs, which is: that Father General Rosmini, having last summer visited the Cottolengo Institute, was deeply moved by the experience, and felt himself inspired to co-operate in giving a stable existence to an Institute so close in spirit to that of the Institute of Charity; and that finding at his disposal the sum of money concerned, was ready to apply it for the benefit of the Cottolengo Institute. But in offering to take on the Cottolengo work, he had no intention of excluding the good Canon and his four companions, who direct it with such zeal. Rather, he would count on them and on their effective co-operation. But as for not making any changes in the rule of the religious or in other norms which there may be, he could never take on this task without first knowing these rules in detail, since he would not wish to have his hands tied, should experience and good reasons indicate the need and the opportunity to make changes or additions for the greater good of the work. Indeed he would want to have the same freedom that the present directors enjoy.

If the Canon wishes, give him a true idea of the Institute of Charity. Tell him further that if this plan materializes, I would like to take things over very quietly, with no publicity. For your part, try to find out how things stand at present, and in particular, how such a vast work can be run by so few people.

As for the way the funds I am offering will be applied, whether solely for the sick, or for the whole group of men (if this is what he speaks to you about), leave the matter open, and ask him what he himself would prefer

Finally, send me a clear account of the people, both men and women, who make up the establishment. Continue to pray over the matter to Mary our Mother, and remember me too in your prayers.

Your affectionate brother in Christ,
R. p.

Rosmini had sent Molinari from the Sagra di San Michele to Turin so that he might in strict secrecy negotiate with Canon Anglesio, the successor of Cottolengo (who had died some months previously) over taking on the work of the Piccola Casa. In this way Rosmini, out of the generosity of his heart, intended to come to the help of suffering humanity, and to begin the work of the medical College which was the inspiration of the Prince of Aremburg, who had offered a generous endowment. Rosmini was disposed in the meanwhile to supply 300,000 francs for the care of the sick, and possibly for all the men, in the Cottolengo Institute, as this letter shows. The women would have to be maintained, as in the past, by the alms given by pious souls. Rosmini's proposal was not in fact accepted. But he was not put out by this, and was content to have done what he felt his heart prompted him to see as his duty.

89. To Don G. B. Pagani at Oscott College

Stresa, 6 January 1843

My dear brother in Christ,

Why is it, my dear man, that you are (as your letter tells me) in a state of bitter affliction? What is this all about? Is it right for the servants of God to be sad and melancholy? Instead they should *Praise the Lord with the lyre, make melody to him with the harp of ten strings*. You are inclined by temperament to be sad; but you must overcome this tendency by heeding No.7 of the Rules of Modesty [‘wear an air of cheerfulness rather than of sorrow . . .’]. Take up some hobby; use moderate relaxation; cultivate *a conversation which is courteous and agreeable* (as St Augustine puts it), modelling yourself on the saints who have been outstanding for their Christian joy, like St Philip [Neri]; take some refreshing drink - all these are useful means to this end of cheering yourself up. Remember how the devil spreads his snares in moods of depression; and one of his devices is to get a man to look on himself as a failure, thinking that this shows a spirit of humility. But he deceives himself, for it may easily be a subtle pride. To *agonize* over the faults we have committed is a form of pride; for this disquiet of mind comes of believing that *we ourselves* could easily have avoided them, and failing to realize that we are at any moment capable of falling into sin, even when we seem to be safe - as we are reminded by the fine and very true reflection of Scupoli (Book I, chapter IV) so much praised by St Francis de Sales.

And so I simply cannot understand how it is that you are upset and afflict yourself over the mistakes you made at Prior Park, as if it were some great marvel that a fallible and inexperienced man should have fallen into them. Instead you should bear in mind that when you are doing well you ought to be ready to think of yourself as having done amiss. Because it is a sheer accident when you do good rather than ill, and you must say: *If there was any good, it came from God; if there was evil, that came from me.* So make it your care to enlarge your heart, to thank God ceaselessly because he did not allow you to commit much worse faults than the ones you were actually guilty of. And with this thought in mind, rejoice in his mercy, and build up an *unlimited* hope in him. For our hope ought to be boundless - but placed entirely in God, not in ourselves, not in men or human means. Ask God to give you the infinite treasure of this hope in him. And then, encouraged and strengthened in this way, you will not worry about the future or the past.

I send my love to all my beloved brethren in Jesus Christ, our love and our life.

Yours affectionately,
ROSMINI p.

90. To Don Giacomo Molinari in Turin

Stresa, 8 January 1843

. . . I have sent on your letter to Cicoletti together with one of my own. You wrong me when you say that in giving me this commission you are afraid that my occupations may prevent me from carrying it out. The love that exists between us is so precious that I would gladly leave other things aside so as to co-operate with you. This love is a great treasure that we must use every effort to preserve and increase! If we really understand our Institute and its rules, we shall truly love one another as the Lord has commanded us. So you must exert yourself not only to maintain and increase love in yourself but also to stir it up in others. In what you wrote to Cicoletti, although it was in joke, you were not sufficiently careful to avoid giving offence. Goodbye.

Your affectionate brother in Christ,
ROSMINI p.

91. To Don Vincenzo Cicoletti at Domodossola

Stresa, 8 January 1843

My dear brother in Christ,

The enclosed is from our good brother Molinari. I see from reading it that he asks your pardon for certain expressions in one of his letters which, on the face of it, could offend

against charity - and indeed that is how you saw them. But they were really meant as a friendly joke. So I take this opportunity to urge you as forcefully as I can to put a good interpretation on anything your brethren say to you. And as regards Molinari, I assure you that his heart is full of love, and that you have misunderstood him. I am afraid, my dear Cicoletti, that you look at things more with your head than with your heart. But I want to see in all our men hearts that are cheerful and well-disposed, so that they leave their brethren free to speak and joke, without there ever arising any discord or ill will. So make a resolution to put a good construction on everything, and not to take seriously what is said to you in jest. No, my dear man, Don Giacomo had no wish to hurt you by the expressions he used, but rather aimed to prompt a joking reply from you, since when friends use a certain liberty among themselves, this (when it is properly understood) makes friendship grow. And what I say to you with respect to Don Molinari you must apply also to your other brethren. Be familiar with them; show them that you take everything in the right way, good-naturedly. Behaving like this is a great help to preserving in our houses that delightful mutual charity which is our first law, and which must yield us so much consolation in our lives together. Goodbye, my dear Cicoletti: pray for me, and greet for me all our brethren there.

Your affectionate brother in Christ,
A. ROSMINI p.

92. To Don Giulio Padulli in Milan

Stresa, 15 February 1843

. . . How can you doubt that you are one of those who are most dear to me? So you have always been and will be, along with Mellerio and the good Giovanni. I know that the Lord is dealing with you as men treat precious metals - and blessed are you for it. So do not upset yourself - even over being upset! - and thus avoid a greater harm. Since the Lord is our support, let us support one another, and put our hopes in him, since in the end we shall receive from him everything we pray for. If he does not give it at once, it is often because this apparent refusal of the grace we ask for is the way in which he leads us finally to obtain it. What else can we long for but true holiness - and the true humility which is such a great part of holiness? It is just as well if he does not at once grant us the grace of showing that gentleness in our speech and actions for which he has given us such a lively desire, for this is solely because he wants us to do all we can on our own, and so learn to know ourselves for what we are. This knowledge is the principle behind the humility and the meekness which we ask of him.

I will pray and get others to pray to the Lord for your wife and children; and you will certainly have every reason to see it as a great grace if God takes one of them into his service. Such a grace will be the reward for the holy education that you will be providing for them.

Greet for me Mellerio and your brother; and continue to pray for me and for my small but dear religious family. Goodbye.

Yours affectionately in Christ,
ROSMINI p.

93. To Giuseppe Fiacchetti at Domodossola

Stresa, 9 February 1843

My dear son in Christ,

Be quite sure that you will make progress to the extent that you use force against yourself. What is the good of learning many things if you do not learn to be obedient? It is a great delusion in anyone who is called to the religious life - especially in our Institute - if he wants to live without obeying! After two years in the noviciate, surely it is now time to put this into practice? Do you think that you can ever become a true member of the Institute, one useful to himself and able to give glory to God, unless you become perfect in obedience? What use is a disobedient religious, one who does not know how to master himself, put aside his own judgement, deny himself, mortify his passions and inclinations? I only wish you understood well the end and aim of the Institute. If you did, I am sure you would not only be obedient in everything, and give up your own will, but you would even be ready to die rather than disobey and resist your Superiors. Just as obedience draws to itself all the other virtues, so disobedience produces all possible faults - and particularly that loathsome thing, so opposed to the spirit of the Institute, deceit, dissimulation and even hypocrisy! May God guard us from even the shadow of such spiritual evils . . . and all the more so because in the end these things come to light, and the Institute cannot for a moment tolerate them within its bosom. My dear son, whatever happens, be obedient - always, sincerely, zealously, with love, with all your heart. Show love and respect without distinction of persons towards *all* those who as representatives of God himself give you orders. I am quite sure that even if there were another Solomon in the Institute, he would afford me no pleasure or consolation if he were not obedient - rather he would cause me sorrow. In the Institute the only sort of virtue we value is that taught by Jesus Christ; and all true virtue is summed up in obedience and charity. So take courage and act so that I may hear from your Superiors and your Master that you are a model of obedience and charity! This is the only thing I expect from you and from all our brethren. Whenever there is a seed of hope, it is then that I await confidently to see God's blessing on my brothers and spiritual sons. May this desire of mine stimulate in you a determination finally to satisfy it!

May Jesus and Mary bless you, and give you the true good for which you were created and called to perfection.

Your father in Christ,
A. R.

94. To Monsignor Nicholas Wiseman in Birmingham

Stresa, 15 February 1843

Reverend Monsignor,

My friend Don Giovanbattista Pagani tells me of the honour you wish to do to the Institute of Charity by belonging to it as an ascribed member. This course can only have been suggested to you by your great charity; and since I greatly value being able to enter a name as illustrious and respected as yours beside those of the other eminent prelates who have also done honour to the Institute by joining it, I must offer you my sincere thanks. May this little Society of ours be of help to England, and especially to the Midland District, whose pastors make piety flourish; and may it also play its part in hastening the return to the bosom of the Church of the many souls there for whom it would seem that the hour of grace is imminent. This is my wish. And so that it may the more readily come to pass I also earnestly ask you to be kind enough to accept the position of *President* over all those who are ascribed within your District. It is in fact our custom that whenever a prelate does us the honour of becoming an ascribed member of the Institute, we ask him to preside over the other members within his charge.

With the greatest respect I beg for your episcopal blessing on the whole Institute, and on myself, who have the honour to be your devoted servant.

A. ROSMINI p.

Cardinal Nicholas Wiseman, the well-known author of *Fabiola* and other valuable works, was at the time the Coadjutor Bishop of Mgr Walsh, the Vicar Apostolic of the Midland District of England.

95. To Virginia Rosmini at Rovereto

Stresa, 19 February 1843

. . . It is not so much difficult as painful to give you the advice you ask for in your letter. Not that it is all that easy to weigh up the why's and wherefore's of the reasons you explain, since I admit that there are good ones on either side. But when one cannot untie a knot, one can cut it with a sword, as Alexander did with the Gordian knot. But, alas!, at the mention of a sword you shudder. And this is why I say that it is a painful thing to have to advise you to cut the knot rather than untie it. But I trust in your virtue. My dear Signora Virginia, your virtue is so great that anyone who knows you as I do can do no

less than wish to see every further perfection in you. So I must not ask of you a little thing, but rather something great and perfect. You are capable of this, and you cannot but feel the call to the heights to which the most virtuous souls aspire, which they are eager for as the culmination of their happiness. But some are held back in their progress by powerful affections which virtue calls them to sacrifice. And this is why the poets place virtue at the summit of a mountain which, while to climb it is arduous, once climbed yields great joy and delight. Yes, it is a fallacy to see virtue as residing in the natural affections, as is suggested by certain books which enfeeble and enervate the soul. Rather it wholly consists in the mastery of oneself. And it is upon the self-mastery which you possess (or at least aim to have, as your letter proves to me; for in that letter you are clearly seeking the best reason for acting) that I am depending, as on a solid pillar, when I give you firm advice as the friend I profess to be. So because you are virtuous I know that you will take in good part what I say, and it will be the less painful for you to receive it as coming from someone who has in mind your spiritual good - just as my knowledge of your virtue makes it less painful for me to give it. And this is my advice.

Among the various reasonings on one side and the other which you explain in your letter there is one which for me tips the balance. And what is that, my dear Virginia? It is your husband's wish. So this is the act of virtue I propose to you: to please your husband by sacrificing your own natural affections. I see it as a cutting of the knot, as I said in the beginning; and to do this calls for the sword of someone heroic. But remember that to have done what is best, at whatever cost, never caused anyone to regret it afterwards; and you are worthy to do what is best at all times. So this is what I want for you: this is what I advise. Blessed are those who are under obedience, as we religious are, and you married ladies too, because we can come to a safe decision in all eventualities. Through obedience to those over us we can, if not untie the knot, at any rate cut it. In a word we can find what is best. What is needed if we are to experience and appreciate this happiness? One thing only: to have a mind that is resolved always to do what is best, whatever sacrifice this calls for. And you, my good cousin, certainly have such a mind. I know this because I know you. And you will be blessed! Our Angelica will reward you for the sacrifice you make on her behalf by returning, after a year, to her mother's arms, with greater eagerness, better instructed, more virtuous. And the daughter will also find her mother more virtuous, stronger, richer in merit. And the father will embrace both mother and daughter, immeasurably happy for both of them. Here is an example of domestic happiness.

My esteemed cousin, you may find me strict. Still you cannot but recognize that I faithfully advise you. And that is all I aim to do.

Give my greetings to little Piero and Carlo, and a kiss to Giovanni. And since you are so good I charge you also to greet for me the Fedrigottis. But especially, pray for the one who with much esteem signs himself -

Your humble and affectionate cousin,

The circumstances of this letter to Rosmini's cousin, Virginia, were these: her husband wished to send their daughter, Angelica, to be educated for a year away from home, but the girl's mother was reluctant to agree to this, and wrote to Antonio asking for his advice.

96. To Michele Parma in Milan

Stresa, 23 February 1843

My dear Signor Parma,

I gather from your letter that the Lord wishes to test you and give you an opportunity to purify your soul still further. If you fervently and constantly pray for God's grace you will be able to overcome the problems you face over the present situation of your family. I am very sorry to hear that you have found them in a state very different from what you would have wished. The ways of God are lofty, and we have to conform ourselves to them with faith. I am very pleased to hear that in spite of all this, you have by no means lost confidence, and are more resolved than ever to serve the Lord. If the only doubt that arises in your mind over your vocation to the religious life comes from the prospect of the two-year-long noviciate, I advise you to put this out of your mind. Those two years are of great benefit to the soul. During them a man puts himself aside entirely, together with any trust in his judgement and his own powers. This putting aside of self is the foundation of the whole spiritual edifice, and is the beginning of trust in the God who *sees in secret*. In order to attain the state of soul you wish for - simple and poor - it is well to spend quite some time; and the Lord does not usually grant it except to a man who has passed a considerable period in obscurity, and has made himself, out of divine love, like a seed hidden in the ground. This is how our Lord Jesus Christ acted: he spent thirty years in a hidden and apparently useless life, and gave only three to his public life; and he did not begin this until the moment appointed by his Father. So too Moses prepared himself by forty years in solitude for the work to which God had destined him, without his knowing this. Our Blessed Lady preferred a hidden, contemplative life to any other, just as Christ honoured this sort of life more than an active one; and the spirit of the saints always preferred it.

This, then, is why the Institute of Charity takes for its foundation a hidden life given over to prayer and contemplation; and it particularly wishes its sons to love it before any other, and choose it as the better part, not leaving it except when they are urged to do so by charity towards others and commanded by obedience. Truly God alone is our inspiration and moving force, for God alone is our good. Would it be right

to look for anything else? The life of the noviciate is given over to loving God, to being united with God, with all our thoughts and affections directed to him; and it is thus that the angels live. So it often happens that someone who grasps the value of this life, and feels how beneficial it is for the soul, how it corresponds to all that is desired by a heart that is humble and made simple in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, would not wish ever to leave it, but would wish to live and die as a novice, unknown to the world. What we must seek is something absolutely *simple*: moral good alone; greater holiness of soul; and this is the fertile and sure principle that must direct our lives. It frees us from all the delusions of self-love, which is characterized by a restless and venturesome disposition - something quite foreign to the ever contented and peaceful temperament of one who genuinely loves God, and by him alone is gently motivated at such times and moments as are unknown to the human mind but known only by God who, when we least expect it, shows them to us and makes clear his will.

So, my dear Signor Michele, have no misgivings over the length of the noviciate. When you pray to God, asking him for light over the matter, I am sure you will change your point of view, with the result that this *length* will become for you one of the most compelling reasons for wanting to take on the religious life. I do not intend my words to persuade you to choose one thing rather than another, but simply to assure you that the length of the noviciate should not in the least deter you from accepting the call that God has given you to consecrate yourself solely to him. You must give mature consideration to the circumstances in which you find yourself, and weigh everything in the light of those eternal truths which have never deceived anyone.

All my brethren here send you their greetings and will pray for you. Continue with your prayers and meditations; and pray also for me -

Yours affectionately in Christ,
A. ROSMINI p.

97. To Don G. B. Imperatori in Domodossola

Stresa, 25 February 1843

My dear friend in Christ,

I was delighted to hear from my good Don Giambattista, and to receive your good news and learn about your love of and diligence in the school, where you are gaining so much merit in the sight of the Lord. I thank you for all your news, my friend, and I could almost say I envy you.

I take this opportunity to say a word about the coming Lent. I forbid those of you who teach in the school to fast. *Obey, then, with no excuses.* All right - you are a substitute teacher: but in this matter I want no argument. Remember that God will be more pleased with you if you take normal meals than if you were to fast. And this is the

decision of your Superior, so that is enough. What an excellent thing it is to live under obedience! The obedient man must always be happy and be large-hearted. Do you know why? It is because when a man is large-hearted, God fills him with roses and lilies - even, if you like, with sweet things. So if you would like heavenly confections, your heart must never be narrow, but rather extended and spread abroad in charity, in obedience and the joy of obedience: *I ran in the way of your commandments for you enlarged my heart.*

My warm greetings to you, as well as to the whole sweet-smelling bouquet of flowers there - I mean my other brethren. Goodbye.

Yours in Christ,
ROSMINI p.

98. To Pietro Faldi in Rome

Stresa, 27 February 1843

Dear Sir,

There resides in Rome, for the sake of his health, a priest of the Institute of Charity called Giacomo Bernardo Mazzi, who lives with Don Paolo Barola in the Piazza di Venezia. If you would like to visit him you will be able to learn about the nature of the Institute, as you wish, and also to see its Rules and the *Apostolic Letters* of approval which describe verbatim its fundamental constitution and organization.

You will gather from all these things that those who join the Institute make it their purpose to direct all their powers in order to attain one good alone - *perfect justice or holiness*, such as was taught by our Lord Jesus Christ; and to this end they devote themselves, no longer setting any value on temporal things which they look on *ut stercora* [the words of St Paul, meaning literally 'as so much dung']. The perfect justice taught by our Lord consists principally in the effort to purify our consciences from sin, and not to offend or displease in the slightest the divine majesty. With this aim in view they practise *universal charity* under the guidance of *perfect obedience* as the interpreter of divine Providence which, as the voice of God himself, makes clear the divine will. You will understand how great must be the humility and mortification of the flesh and of self-love entailed in such a profession and such a life. But on the other hand, through these exertions together with prayer and suffering, a man can attain the peace which the world despises, but which nothing can disturb or take away. Peace resides in the things which do not change; and God alone is changeless. The heart of Jesus Christ alone is calm and peaceful; and whoever lives in that heart shares that peace. Persecution and external disturbance do not take it away, since they do not at all trouble the heart of Christ, in whom the faithful disciple lives.

I do not need to tell you that the work you have in mind cannot make progress except through much prayer, and can only be carried out with the generosity which comes of that prayer.

Your affectionate servant,
A. R.

99. To the Marchesa Adele Benso di Cavour in Turin

Stresa, 8 March 1843

Madam,

I should very much like to be in Turin so that I could greet my friend [Gustavo] on his return from France, and we could open our hearts to one another. But since it is not possible for me to have this satisfaction, I should at least like to greet him briefly with the letter I enclose, and which I would ask you, my dear Marchesa, to be so good as to hand over to Gustavo when you have the consolation of welcoming him back after his long journey.

I am sure that since he, like his mother, is virtuous, if he felt some displeasure at being treated in a way that he so little deserved, he will soon get over it, and he will only remember his own generosity. I can assure you that in this miserable affair I grieved mostly at the thought of the pain that Gustavo and his parents might be suffering. But I hope this is now all in the past; and so let us speak of other matters.

Your fears are those of a pious mother. It is certain that everyone has good reason to be afraid of the most cunning and subtle of all the enemies of our salvation - which is self-love. How well that good forefather of Gustavo characterized self-love, calling it 'a great cheat'! And that is why we have to be very much on our guard against its crafty tricks, and to ask the Lord to defend by his grace ourselves and those dear to us. Self-love is fed by the sweet poison of praise; and sometimes we are better helped by the censures and attacks of our enemies than by the plaudits and compliments of our dear friends. I am so convinced of this truth that I have always thanked God for the opposition I have endured from many people whom I have never offended against; and I fully recognize that to be ill-treated and slandered is much more for the benefit of my soul than the opposite treatment. And now our dear Marchese Gustavo too is sharing this same spiritual antidote [to pride], so that from this point of view we can look on the injustice he has suffered as part of the disposition of divine goodness. For the rest, I am confident that because his soul is so profoundly religious, any flattering approval that may follow from his scientific labours will not tempt him into vanity. Indeed he is so good that if I saw any danger of this happening, I would candidly speak to him of the emptiness of looking for human praise when nothing can be of help for our eternal salvation but pleasing God and winning his approval. I am sure he would tell me that

he has, and wishes to have, an ever more pure intention of doing nothing except to the greater glory of God alone. Even so, should the occasion arise, I promise to keep in mind the holy and motherly fears that you have confided to me. I have not such close links with Count Camillo as I have with Gustavo; but still I will not fail to pray to the Lord for him, unworthy as I am. I believe that Gustavo himself can be of service to him, by often having to do with him and little by little communicating to him something of his own feelings, and his own piety.

Please do give my regards to the Marchese, and be assured of my deep devotion and respect.

R. p.

It would seem that the Marchese had been subjected to attacks and verbal abuse because in France he had championed Rosmini's teachings.

100. To the Marchese Gustavo Benso di Cavour

Stresa, 8 March 1843

My dear and much respected Marchese,

How much I should like to be to be in Turin to welcome you, if only I could! There are so many things my heart would prompt me to say to you, so many things I should like to hear from you! But since I cannot do this in person, at least I want to write you a few lines - first to tell you that I read with the utmost satisfaction your dignified and moderate reply to Gioberti. Here, all those who have seen it highly approve of it. It was a manifest injustice on the part of that periodical, first to promise and then to refuse to publish it. But the truth loses nothing, either of its worth or of the light it sheds, because of the injustice it meets with. Rather, we must be ready to suffer something for our love of this truth for which above all He suffered who is Truth itself. Truly no one can greatly love truth in this world without being rewarded by receiving insults and abuse from men. But to a generous-hearted man such insults are most dear: it is the honour he covets. I have never repented of having written something true and good, only to be abused for it. And it was this thought that consoled me, even in the distress I felt at first when I saw my friend treated so savagely and unjustly - my friend who had acted in my defence. So too it is consoling to recall how the red-hot iron is tempered by being immersed in cold water; and so the soul of my dear Marchese Gustavo, since he has grown in merit through his patience, has lost nothing but instead gained much in that love of truth on account of which his sufferings began. So I greet you affectionately and am full of grateful friendship in the Lord.

Yours entirely,
A. ROSMINI p.

101. To Caterina Rosmini in Trent

Stresa, 15 March 1843

My dear Nina of Jesus,

I address you by this name (by which you signed yourself), hoping that it is not merely an empty sound, but rather the sincere expression of what you want to be and what Jesus wishes you to be. I base my hope on the evidence of your constancy in wishing to become a poor servant of Christ, consecrated to him among these holy Sisters of Providence. I have already established a foundation of fourteen of them in Paradise, and I trust that they have been gathered into the convent of heaven, judging by the great peace and joy with which they left us at their death. And now I have another dying Sister here who, with a smile on her lips and the deepest calm in her heart, longs for the moment when she will be joined to her beloved Spouse with an eternal embrace. It is impossible to leave her bedside without being firmly convinced that she is a soul predestined for heaven.

You ask me for some good advice; and here is something that can greatly help you if you thoroughly grasp it and put it into practice. Anyone consecrated to God must not allow herself to be influenced by the moods or dispositions of those she has to do with, except when it comes to deriving edification from them. Rather, being constant herself, she must see to it that through her exchanges with others she exercises a good influence on them. For example, if she finds herself in the company of someone who is sad and depressed, she must not share that depression but instead, through her unflinching cheerfulness and gentleness, spread something of the holy joy she has in her heart, and try in every way to do good to that person. This is the special way of those souls who rely on God alone and conform themselves entirely according to what God asks of them, rather than to what is said and done and suffered by people in general. Then they come to no harm, whatever the temperament of the person they are talking to; and in fact they exercise great charity towards them continually, in a way that is only possible for those who have a mastery of themselves and who order their affections by the light of reason and of grace. And how important is this beautiful quality in religious life! So set yourself to acquire it, through prayer and using violence against yourself, if ever you feel that you do not yet possess it entirely.

You speak of coming next autumn. For my part, since I believe you have a real vocation, I am ready to receive you. But what does your father say about this? You must ask his advice. Does he think you are mature enough? If there are problems, I will tell you how to overcome them: by means of *prayer made in faith*. Pray to Jesus, whose name you are so pleased to take. If he opens the door for you to enter his espousals, no

one will close it to you, no one at all, be sure of it. Pray, then: have faith; and you will certainly become a Sister of Providence. Pray for -

Your affectionate cousin,
ROSMINI p.

102. To the abbé Luquet, a missionary priest in Paris

Stresa, 31 March 1843

My dear Father,

I cannot forbear to express my thanks to you for the information and spiritual consolation I derived from reading your letters to the Bishop of Langres about the Congregation of the Foreign Missions. I am most grateful for the gift of your book, and I felt I had to write to you about it. In addition to the lively piety and zeal for the spreading of the gospel which breathe from every chapter of your learned work, I very often found in it sentiments so close to my own that I was moved to feel not only esteem but a special affection in Jesus Christ for its author. I intend to have your letters read by all the priests of our little Institute, and I am sure this will be for their spiritual gain and foster even further their zeal for the missions to those who are without the faith. Our members have to be always ready for such missions, according to the spirit of their vocation and the undertaking they gave on entry. May God bless and make fruitful your labours and those of your co-workers! And may he bring it about that we on our part may share in that apostolic work, offering not only our work but our lives! I hope that in your charity you will make a memento of this intention in your Mass.

I am, with sincere esteem, your devoted servant and brother in Jesus Christ.

A. ROSMINI p.

103. To Don Clemente Alvazzi at the Sagra di San Michele

Stresa, 11 April 1843

My dear brother in Christ,

Have no doubts that you will receive what you ask for if you draw your strength from the Lord Jesus Christ. The three means you mention are *infallible*: (1) great trust in the power of God alone; (2) fervent prayer, asking for spiritual gifts; and (3) *perfect frankness* towards the spiritual father God has given you., from whose mouth you hear the word of God. The enemy of good deceives our imaginations: we have to humiliate him, mortify him, overpower him as we would a madman. The weapons that are invincible are denial of our own will and mortification of our own desires.

I was very pleased to hear that you have written four discourses on the Blessed Sacrament. Work hard, too, on both the style and the connection of thoughts in these. I can well believe that the external work of preaching will do much for your fervour of spirit and also give you zest for your studies. See that these are done in virtue of obedience, with humility and great *purity of intention*. It would be very useful if you were to apply yourself to reading some sacred orators who could help to develop your own talents, reading them not just once but again and again until they become familiar; write out the passages that appeal to you most and learn them by heart. Studying in this way some author who excels as a preacher is much more useful in learning to write than reading a mass of things. I think the study of Bourdaloue would greatly help you; first because he is full of sound dogma (which is a good foundation for the preacher), and again because there is always a logical connection both in his thought and in the way he orders his arguments. The latter is most necessary for you: you have to learn to *reason*, to go from principles to their consequences, so as not to get lost in mere declamation. There is a place in sacred eloquence for feelings, for vehemence, for exhortation and so on: but these things must never lead the speaker to lose the thread of his argument. There must always be a basis of solid reasoning. And this fine French preacher will help you here. But you need to try to adapt your presentation to a popular audience and give it an Italian dress. Here I would recommend you to read Cesari mainly, and try to imitate him in both language and style. For the rest, though, it is necessary to temper everything according to your own way of thinking and feeling, as your mind may suggest. All in all, then, take courage, be holy, and preach well. It would make me very happy to see you become a good missionary! You did well to undertake a course of study - this is an essential task. If any particular aspect of the teaching is specially to your taste, then you could concentrate on that.

It is time for Mass. Goodbye.

Your affectionate brother in Christ,
A. ROSMINI p.

104. To Michele Parma in Milan

Stresa, 15 April 1843

My dear Signor Parma,

I was very sorry to hear that your health is not good, and that your various occupations make you postpone the time when we shall be together with the sole purpose of loving and serving the Lord. But my grief at your news is compensated by the spiritual consolation I derive from seeing your constancy and your trust in God. These give me a sure hope that he will resolve things and produce a happy outcome. But first God wants to exercise you in patience and resignation, and to cause you to put yourself more and

more completely into his loving hands, and obtain by prayer that great grace that he wishes to give you, but which we have to ask and urgently beg of him. So I will join my poor prayers to yours and get my dear companions to pray too. Our aim is that the Lord will make us holy and that we may do whatever makes for his greater glory. May he be ever blessed! He is all-wise, all-powerful and all-good; and for those to whom he grants a great desire to consecrate themselves to him alone (after leaving the world and its ways) it is his custom in his own good time to make that desire effectual; and since it comes from him it can never fail to come to perfection. So in the meantime prepare yourself for the great sacrifice, and in this way you will come to the holy discipline of religious life all the better equipped.

For now I embrace you in the Lord; and if your arrival among us has to be delayed, do not fail to send us news of yourself. May the holy feast of Easter bring you great consolation.

Yours affectionately in Christ,
ROSMINI p.

105. To Don Fortunato Signini at Oscott

Stresa, 25 April 1843

My dear Signini. my beloved brother in Christ,

The imperfections you mention in your welcome letter are for the most part the effects of your temperament; and so you need not be too troubled over them: only oppose them calmly with the most lively trust in God; with patience and constancy in directing your will to good. So my dear Signini, take courage! You are the same Signini that you once were in Italy - equally dear, equally precious. I am not at all surprised at the struggles you are undergoing and the trial to which God has willed to subject you. Be sure that these things will pass, and that the time will come for the harvest of peace and spiritual profit. Just remember not to expect too much of yourself: we cannot aspire to become perfect in a few days. It is quite wrong to be downcast and sad because we cannot free ourselves from certain daily faults, or because, being mere men, we have to go on foot, rather than fly like a bird. The angel of the Lord allowed Lot to remain for a while in the little town of Zoar before he went up to the hills, and the Fathers see in this an image of a man who, though he flees from his vices, cannot at once arrive at the height of perfection, but lingers for a time down below, safe from the anger of God, who allows this respite out of his kindness, knowing very well the heavy clay of which we are made. Hence St Cyril of Alexandria (in his fine work, *On Adoring God in Spirit and in Truth*) after describing how Lot, instead of at once going up the mountain shown him by the angel, asked if he could be saved in the region he saw at the foot (which the angel allowed), and drew from this the moral: 'God permitted this out of his goodness, and

allowing for the capacity of limited nature, decreed that those too should be saved who while aiming at virtue, yet do not lead lives which are faultless. Yet these also, who aim at a high degree of virtue and press forward to such a state, with the help of a previous enlightenment from above, in the end attain it. 'The sun rose', he said, 'and Lot entered Zoar.' If you meditate on this, it will console you. So I recommend to you nothing more highly than to put all your trust in God, asking him for and confident of receiving everything you need. Your Superiors there, too, have every sympathy with you, though they are zealous for you to be holy. So do not busy your mind any more with thoughts of the past, but begin now to make progress, gently and simply, without thinking that you are bound to avoid all your faults. You will be able to destroy them all with the love of God, as we burn up thorns, clearing the field whenever they re-appear. Be certain that God does not love you any the less even when through human frailty you fall into some defect, provided that you have recourse to him with constant love so as to gain his pardon and greater strength. I hope to greet you soon in Italy, and then to have the opportunity of speaking with you at length of what I should like all our brethren to know to the full - I mean the goodness of God.

Yours affectionately in Christ,
A. ROSMINI p.

106. To Don G. B. Pagani at Oscott College in England

Stresa, 25 April 1843

My dear brother,

What is all this sadness that you tell me about? There can be no doubt, surely, that it is a deception of the devil? Our God is a God of consolation and peace; so you may be certain that if you are subject to depression, this must be a subtle device of the enemy. He insinuates this feeling under the appearance of piety; he arouses a false feeling of repentance for sin and an excessive wish for compunction: the soul wants to be humbled and is insatiable in wishing for self-abasement. But all this is in fact a mental disturbance, coupled with interior bitterness; and this is followed by a clouding over of the mind, a feeling of desolation and discouragement, and a loss of spiritual energy. No, my dear brother, you must not let yourself be deceived in this way. If you will accept my words as coming from God through your Superior (remembering that even Caiaphas was able to prophesy because he was the high priest, and that even Balaam's ass could see and reason better than the prophet himself), you will profit greatly and entirely overcome this terrible enemy who transforms himself into an angel of light in order to deceive you. So I advise you to use the liberty which I believe must be dear to you, and guard yourself against a certain excessive *spiritual austerity* which leads you to be over-subtle and give way to sadness. This fault, which you need to amend in good time,

habitually produces lamentable effects; the devil used it to cause Don Giulio [Todeschi] a fearful struggle, in which he was eventually successful solely through the heroic blind obedience which he gave to the words of his Superior. It has also troubled several other brethren So leave aside any thoughts of the past, and concentrate only on serving the Lord in the future, keeping these maxims in mind:

(1) Do not expect to be without fault, or think that we must necessarily be happy in the Lord when we are without sin. Rather we have to base our hopes of consolation and spiritual joy on the *mercy* of God, and not on our own righteousness.

(2) We must conceive the greatest possible idea of the goodness of God, realizing that it is always infinite, and so we never need fear that we may be exaggerating it.

(3) We need to repose an unlimited trust in God's goodness; and this must never be lessened, not even in the midst of our miseries. We must take it as certain that he is ready to forgive us not seven times but seventy times seven times.

(4) We have to ask for graces without number or limit, and expect in faith that we shall receive them, leaving to God the time and the manner of his giving.

(5) We have to be persuaded that real sorrow for sin consists in the firm *purpose* of avoiding it and of doing as much good as possible - and not in a *feeling* of affliction, sadness, melancholy, or a tendency to despise ourselves.

(6) We must never be upset over our failings, but overcome disquiet and sadness with all the means (both spiritual and natural) which are in our own hands, such as moderate and honest recreation, keeping our thoughts away from anything that might sadden us, keeping busy with things that are indifferent, using affability and humour in conversation, enjoying the happiness of others, and so on.

(7) Using for our meditation joyful topics, such as the goodness of God, the resurrection, heaven, the spiritual riches of the Christian, the love of God and of Christ for us, etc.

In this connection you say you want to make a retreat in order to gain compunction; but I want you to make it with a view to attaining joyfulness of spirit. So I *forbid* you to use the meditations of the first week on the last things, apart from that on heaven. Instead I *command* you to use your time in contemplating things that are cheerful and uplifting to the spirit. I hope, or rather I am sure, that you will obey me.

(8) We must not confuse *venial* sins with *mortal* ones. We cannot be without venial sin in this world, and we must console ourselves with the thought that these do not deprive us of the grace of God, that they are remitted in the Holy Eucharist, and in many other ways that are at our disposal. Hence the man who is in a state of grace should rather rejoice over this than lament over his venial sins. He would do a wrong to his friendship with God if he were to ignore this truth.

(9) Finally we must not obstinately persist in judging ourselves, but leave everything to do with ourselves in the hands of the Lord. So take courage; and may God help you to understand these truths well and put them into practice.

Yours,
A. R.

107. To the cleric Gianbattista Tonolli in Trent

Stresa, 18 May 1843

My dear Tonolli,

I was very pleased to receive your letter and the news that you are more and more resolute over your vocation. The Lord will, I hope, grant you the grace to follow it, provided you ask this of him in fervent prayer - since he likes us to ask him for everything, and particularly when it is a matter of the highest sort of graces. You need also to keep a prudent silence, so as not to give any opportunity to the enemy of good to upset this holy plan, as he is wont to do. Above all put yourself under the protection of our Lady, and expect to receive all good things through the intercession of our tender Mother.

I am not sure whether you are past the age for conscription. If so, it would be as well not to defer matters any further. Instead, arrange to carry out your plan this autumn, when I hope to see you and sort everything out when we can talk together.

Continue to meditate on the words of Jesus Christ, and on the extract from them contained in the booklet you were given. Try to grow every day in the desire to know Jesus intimately, thinking about all that he said and did in his life; and get as close to him as you can. Pray also to Jesus and Mary for me. Goodbye.

ROSMINI p.

108. To Don G. B. Pagani at Oscott College

Stresa, 26 May 1843

My dear brother in Christ,

Those words in your letter, 'Since God has deprived me of joy, I greatly fear that I am not in a state of grace,' show what a mistake you are making. Do you think this is a sound piece of reasoning - 'I fear I am not in a state of grace because I do not feel joyful.'? It is a sheer deception of the devil: it is the same sophism with which he deceived, or tried to deceive, Don Giulio [Todeschi]. But he entirely overcame the temptation through the deepest humility and perfect obedience. We must not suppose that we have a right to be given happiness and joy by God; rather we have to be equally ready to receive from him dryness, sadness, darkness - without inferring from this that we are no longer in God's graces.

Can we be sure that we are in a state of grace? No one in the world, as you well know, can know this, can be certain of this, without a special revelation. And what of it? Must we then afflict ourselves? No: instead we have to stop trusting in ourselves and in our own righteousness, and abandon ourselves calmly and entirely into the loving hands of our Lord Jesus Christ, gladly saying to him: 'My lot is in your hands'. We must be nothing like those St Paul speaks of: *Being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they have not submitted to God's righteousness*. What is the righteousness of God? It is nothing other than his mercy - that is, the righteousness he gives to men solely out of his mercy: the righteousness that St Paul calls 'the righteousness of faith' - in other words the righteousness that comes to birth in man through faith, through the total trust and confidence that he puts in the goodness and faithfulness of God. And this righteousness or justice of God which man acquires through the trust in God's mercy that is never disappointed is opposed by St Paul to 'the righteousness of man', also called 'righteousness *ex operibus*' [coming from our works], which the apostle would not have us trust to. God alone is to be glorified, not ourselves. All through the Letter to the Romans the apostle is concerned to teach precisely this: that we must not claim to be without faults (a notion that scripture also conveys when it says: *do not pretend be over-righteous*). Rather we have to live fully persuaded that for our part we are always sinners, in the first place as far as venial sins are concerned, and at root not excluding all manner of sins. Yet at the same time the apostle wants us to believe that we are *righteous in Christ* - that is, in the hope engendered by his goodness, by the greatness of his merits, and by our faith in his sacraments.

When we are aware that we have committed some sin, we must use the sacrament that cancels it out. But if we are not aware of our faults, we must still put our faith in the goodness of God, and be certain that it is never lacking for those who entrust themselves to it, even though they are sinners. In this consists the *glory of the grace of Jesus Christ* - that it freely brings a remedy to our sins, and makes us holy through faith brought alive by love. We simply cannot be made righteous through our own actions. So make a clear distinction between a feeling of sadness (on the one hand) and a fear of being in disgrace with God (on the other). Your defect lies not in the first but in the second. You must take no notice of the first; but the second is something you must take seriously. You have to try to dispel the *feeling of sadness*; but do not assume that you are bound to succeed in this. If you cannot do so, put up with it: be resigned, as with any other affliction. But look on a *disturbing fear of being in disgrace with God* as your enemy, as a trick of the devil, as a fault of self-love which plants itself in your soul and flourishes because of your lack of faith in the goodness of Jesus Christ. So get rid of it at any cost; never let your will consent to it, and tolerate it all the less, the more it presents itself to you *sub specie boni* [under the appearance of good], as if for instance it were humility. (This is a most subtle device of the enemy.) He makes us believe that it is an act of great piety to abase ourselves entirely; but there is a false and wrong kind of self-

abasement which, stemming from a deficient faith in God, produces a feeling of sadness and discouragement; and this substitutes itself for the good kind of humility which is able to *glory in the Lord*. Anyone who has this kind of humility considers his own weakness as a continuous sign of the victory of the glory of Jesus Christ. With such an attitude, a man remains in Christ as the branch in the vine; and he is as closely united with him as a baby is with its mother. I will tell you what St Augustine says: ‘We voyage as on a lake, not without winds and storms. Our passage is threatened by the daily perils of this world. How does this come about except because Jesus is asleep? If Jesus were not asleep within you, you would not suffer these tempests; you would have interior peace if Jesus were with you, watching. What does this mean - “Jesus is asleep”? It means that your faith, which is from Jesus, is asleep.’ (Enarr. in Ps XXV). So think about those last words: re-awaken your faith in God’s goodness. It is quite impossible for anyone who knows the goodness of God to let himself be oppressed by the thought that he is in disgrace with God; since for us to pass from being out of his grace to being in it is the work of his goodness, and this is never lacking to those who hope in him. You may perhaps say to yourself, ‘I know all this, and Fr General wastes his labour in giving me this lesson.’ Do not say this. Rather, accept Fr General’s lesson in all humility, with docility, as if you were an ignorant man. Think of it as if it were something new, something you had never heard before. Then, after praying over all this, you will recover your original liberty of spirit, and you will learn how to bear this involuntary sadness which cannot be banished, but on which we must never base any adverse judgement on ourselves. Goodbye.

Your affectionate brother in Christ,
A. R.

109. To Don G. B. Pagani at Oscott College

Stresa, 26 May 1843

My dear brother in Christ,

There is something I must say to you. I do not want you to speak to these English brethren of ours so confidently, so as to make them take the view that Italians are quite incapable of judging what is suitable for England, and that they alone, or those of you who have spent many years over there, can properly judge such matters. It seems to me that when you were talking to Furlong during your journey together on leaving here, you did not observe this rule of prudence. So I thought it well to bring this to your notice in good time, before any harm could result. Certainly there is as yet no cause for fear; but in course of time, by acting in this manner you could sow the seeds of trouble. It could come about that an English faction came into being within the Society, thus lessening union with Superiors, a diminished esteem, and at the same time banding together our

Italian brethren in that island. You can easily understand how easy it would be for nationality, little by little, to replace charity, obedience and humility. Rather than say or do anything that could be opposed to those virtues, or lessen the practice of them among us, be content that things in England should go less well. Let Superiors judge of them, even if there is a danger of their making mistakes. Because God, who allows us to make mistakes, does not do so himself; and he will draw from our errors a greater good for his glory. Faith in divine Providence is the basis of obedience: it is what leads us willingly to renounce our own judgement.

Blessings and warm greetings to all our brethren.

Your brother in Christ,

A. ROSMINI p.

110. To Caterina Rosmini di Leonardo in Trent

Stresa, 5 June 1843

My dear Nina,

I have already told you that you need to obtain from God through your prayers the consent and the great grace you hope for so that you can go ahead with your holy vocation. Also, your wise confessor does well to set you the task of giving him ever greater proofs that you are quite firm in your resolution, and convincing him that you are trying hard to overcome yourself and practise all the virtues - not only the interior ones which involve you alone but also the visible and social ones. As you say, the Sisters of Providence do not have enclosure, but they live so retired that they have no dealings with other people except for the one motive of carrying out their duties of charity - in short, for God. After three years of noviciate they then take vows for successive periods of three years.

Meanwhile I am glad to hear that your father is content for you to follow the call of the Lord - I never doubted that he would be. So for the present you must remain at peace and occupy yourself in sanctifying yourself and in showing that you act in all circumstances with the maturity and wisdom of a *Christian* woman. Leave everything else in the hands of the loveable Providence of our Lord and of the Blessed Virgin your Mother who, I might say, holds the reins in this matter.

This autumn, God willing, I will make my way to Rovereto. Who knows whether by then your confessor will be convinced that you have 'an old head on young shoulders'? Should this be the case, I will speak to your father and conclude matters. In the meantime, pray earnestly, and continue to offer yourself on the altar as a victim of the love of God and of your neighbour, together with the spotless Lamb. Pray also for your future companions. The Superior of whom I spoke in my previous letter is still almost miraculously alive; but her life is being consumed in an enviable tranquillity, as

she sighs ceaselessly to be wholly united with her Lord and Spouse. Pray for those who are shortly to set out for England so as to help to advance the progress that is being made there by the Catholic religion, and spend themselves in the wonderful work of bringing about the salvation of their neighbour, for the honour of God. Do you not envy their lot - you who want in the future to belong *wholly to Jesus crucified*? Finally, pray for -

Your affectionate cousin,
A. ROSMINI p.

111. To Countess Teodora Bielinski in Milan

Stresa. 8 June 1843

My dear Countess,

I said Mass for you yesterday and again today to ask the heavenly Father, through the merits of his Son Jesus, to grant you a firm faith in this divine Mediator and complete peace of mind. I can well understand how painful it is for a soul that wants to believe, but is disturbed and prevented from giving an entire, unconditional and absolute assent to the revealed truths by renewed thoughts which cause doubt - thoughts which certainly come from the enemy of our souls. These thoughts are like the birds of which Christ says in Matthew XIII that they carry away the good seed which was sown by the wayside. At the same time they carry away peace from the heart, and spread there anguish and disquiet. Since these thoughts have so sad an effect, this is a further proof that they come from Satan, the author of evil, and not from God, for he is *a God of peace*, as scripture calls him. And this is surely a sufficient sign that we must shut them out from ourselves, fight against them, loathe them?

The tree is known by its fruit, and so if our thoughts bring us fruits so bitter as desolation, they can only come from an evil tree - that is, from the devil. This enemy of ours is cunning, and we have to be very prudent if we are to unmask his deceptions. How did he deceive our first mother, Eve? By his arguments. If Eve had not allowed herself to reason with the sly serpent, but instead had trusted the words of God, she would have saved herself, and all of us too. So there are reasonings which are deceptive; and these are the age-old weapons which the devil uses to seduce people. This is because he always wants to appear reasonable in his attacks; and this is why scripture says that he transforms himself into an angel of light. With these captious arguments the old enemy produced all the heresies, even the most monstrous ones that have rent apart the kingdom of Christ, and given rise to infidelity and unbelief. Are we then to give up reasoning? Certainly not. But we have to be on our guard against the subtle arguments that the evil one insinuates into our minds to rob us of our faith in the word of God. How then can we make sure that we are not deceived in this way? There are *general*

signs by which we can distinguish the false reasonings of the devil from the true ones which come from God, the author and light of human reason. We must be watchful, and as soon as we discern from these signs a fraudulent argument, it is up to us to cut the thread of the deceptive reasoning, expel it from our minds, and refuse point blank to listen to it, in case we are seduced and overcome by the serpent. Here are some of the signs to watch out for:

The first is the one I have already mentioned: the *good or bad effect* which a given argument produces in the soul. If it causes discord, it cannot come from God, who is truth, but must be from the rebel angel, the father of lies. It is both simple and salutary to avail ourselves of the counter-sign given us by Jesus when he said: 'Let not your hearts be troubled: believe in God and believe in me.' (Jn XIV).

Another clue to distinguish between the artful reasonings of Satan and those that come from truth, from God, is to see whether the argument is tortuous, muddy, long-drawn-out, involved, and whether in the end it does not produce complete certainty and absolute conviction, but only goes as far as to leave the soul a prey to doubts, with a secret uneasiness. These are bad signs: the light of truth which comes from God is simple, calm, humble, satisfying, uplifting. Let me explain part of this idea. I will limit myself to explaining what I meant by saying that the light of God and the reasoning that arises from it is *simple*, and not at all tortuous, drawn-out, unending.

Let us suppose that someone has been fully converted by virtue of *a single proof* of the truth of the Catholic religion - whatever form this proof may take. It could for instance be a miracle: say the raising of Lazarus, the resurrection of Christ, the fulfilment of a prophesy, a miracle performed by St Gregory the wonder-worker, or any of the many that have occurred during the persecutions inflicted on the Catholic Church, etc. The person in question has been convinced of the truth of just one of these miracles, or by a proof of a different sort. But this person cannot be equally convinced *through his own reasoning* of the truth of the other proofs. What is he to do? If he wants to be reasonable, rational, according to God - i.e. according to the truth - he must believe without hesitation in the truth of the Catholic religion by virtue of the single proof of which he is convinced. The fact that he cannot on his own establish the truth of the other proofs does not matter in the least. It only requires *one* proof for him to be assured of the truth of the Catholic faith. So he is bound to reject any doubts he may have about the validity of the other proofs, and recognize that if the force of them does not come home to him, this may well be the result of the limitations of human reason. But should he instead decide to withhold his assent because he has not in fact verified those other reasonings, he exposes himself to the suggestions of the enemy; and he may well be deceived by the evil one because he has not clung to the truth which he already knows, through that proof of which he had no doubts.

But let us suppose that this person cannot understand all the articles of the Catholic faith, and that some one of them seems to him absurd and contrary to reason. This is of no importance. The Catholic religion has been proved true for him; and if this

is the case, then it is *all* true - not just a part of it. For the Catholic faith is one indivisible whole which is presented to us founded on the word of God; and God could not, for example, confirm it by a miracle if it contained anything false. So the person we are considering must reason on these lines: 'The Catholic religion is true: I know this because I cannot deny that convincing proof. Therefore everything that its system of beliefs contains is true. So any doubts I may have are unfounded: they come of the limitations of my reason. I want, then, to rid myself of any particular reasonings of mine which seem to be opposed to the overall truth I know. I wish to *believe firmly* in everything that the Catholic Church proposes to me, and to reject any inclination to reason further. I no longer have any need to do so.' With this firm reply the enemy is overcome. The serpent's mouth is closed: he can no longer give God the lie; he cannot say (as he did to Eve): 'What God said is untrue: you will not die if you eat of the tree of knowledge.'

Against this, if the person in question, although he has a *proof* of the truth of the Catholic faith, is yet unwilling to believe anything contained among the doctrines of that faith that he has not scrutinized by his reason, he is thereby failing in his duty; he is being unteachable in relation to the known truth. Instead of accepting humbly the word of God that has been made known to him, he is being led by the pride which makes him love disputation and argument: he is an enemy of peace and the simple truth. We have to be persuaded that human reason is extremely limited; that it cannot take in the great mysteries revealed by God, such as the Trinity, the incarnation of the Word in the spotless womb of the Virgin Mary, the Holy Eucharist and so on. It even loses its way very often when it studies the things of the natural world, and meets there a vast number of things that are inexplicable to the very wisest people. Again, human reason is subject to error in the most obvious things; and therefore when it is a question of religion, it must be content to humble itself before the depths and immensity of divine things, to believe all that is contained in the Christian faith (which it has come to know as true in general), and not ask for more. In this way we sacrifice to God *not true reasoning*, but only *all false reasoning* that the *enemy of good* would wish to insinuate into us so as to lead us astray and afflict us.

Surely this sacrifice is most reasonable? Is it not reason itself that recognizes its own powerlessness? So surely it is our duty to believe the truth as soon as we come to know it, without stopping to quibble, and so treat the matter as doubtful. As long as a single article of the Catholic faith is proved to be true, then the whole of that faith is true and proved to be so, even any parts that we do not understand.

Let us now turn to the proof furnished by that miracle, that moral proof, which you yourself, my dear Countess, regard as wholly valid (as you told me). The Catholic faith is holy: it has formed heroes and heroines of holiness. These people were perfect in all the virtues which are most admirable, and yet unknown to the world; and they not only gave their allegiance to that faith: they also drew from it alone the enlightenment and the energy which enabled them to arrive at such innocence of life and generous love

for God. For the sake of this they thought nothing of giving even their lives. Now is it possible that God let these loving people be deceived? Could *lies* and *deception* (both from Satan) have led their souls to God and bound them to him in such intimacy? It would be absurd to suppose so. So their faith was based on truth: *every single article of it was true*. This is enough for me: I have no need to look further, but must embrace these truths at once, even though the serpent may say to me: *By no means*, and try to entangle me in the coils of a useless argument, and make me lose my way in a labyrinth from which I cannot escape. And as long as I twist and turn in this labyrinth, I do not believe: I stay unfaithful to the truth I know: I show myself ungrateful towards the God who made the truth known to me.

So what an infinite blessing is holy faith! It is a whole treasury of the wonders of God's love for us. This is the God who became man and died for us, to save us from sin, to free us from error and ignorance (the effects of sin); the God who pardons our sins and gives us his ministers to assure us of this pardon with complete certainty, since he undertakes to ratify in heaven whatever they loose on earth. He is a Man-God who gives us himself now as our food, and promises to give us himself in unveiled fashion in heaven as a reward for our faith. All these are the mysteries of love, an infinite abyss of charity such that we can never plumb its depths through out human reason. And because this love is so great that it surpasses the puny limits of our reason, are we going to refuse to believe in it? For to fail to believe in the truth of our holy religion is to fail to believe in God's love; if we doubt our religion we doubt God's love. For in the last analysis what the Catholic faith proposes for our belief is nothing other than the boundless nature of the love God has shown us. Yes, these things surpass the limited powers of our reason; it cannot take them in; and if it tries to comprehend them it hesitates and becomes confused. But what is there to wonder at in this? God is God, and we are mere men. The fact that we find it difficult to grasp such mysteries is itself a fresh argument for their truth, and obliges us to give them our entire credence. For if we are unable to put our faith in the superabundance of God's love, far less shall we be able to correspond to it.

It seems to me that I know your heart well through the brief hour when yesterday I had the honour of conversing with you. You wish to correspond to the love of God : very well. Put aside any reasoning with regard to particular aspects of the faith that worry you. Start with the proofs that convince you of the truth of the Catholic religion *in general*; and being certain of this, believe without further hesitation in the individual doctrines that the faith puts forward for your belief. Faith is the first step that love takes. You will correspond with the love of Jesus Christ, who died for you, when you adore in him THE WORD MADE FLESH - the words of St John the evangelist whom you love.

My dear Countess, I took up my pen to suggest to you some book for you to read, as you asked me to do; and instead I have written you a long letter. And since it is written, I will send it off. Perhaps it will please you; at least it will be a sign of the great desire I feel to contribute (if only I could) to the peace of your soul. As for a choice of

books: I am uncertain. There are some excellent ones; but you will draw no profit from books of controversy - at least unless you first accept the principle that 'to believe, it is not necessary to have the answer to every doubt that may arise in the mind over *particular dogmas* of the faith.' When one doubt is laid to rest, ten others spring up in its place. The labour would be unending. Reason never sees the whole picture. It is enough if it sees one sole thing: that 'the Catholic religion is true.' When your mind is persuaded of this general truth (and one single proof out of the many we have must be sufficient), then you must also persuade yourself that there is no point in listening to various objections, and you need to chase them away like dangerous temptations, calling on God himself for help, and never ceasing to say to Jesus Christ: 'I believe, Lord: help my unbelief.' I consider it indispensable for you, if you are to overcome at a single blow all the enemies of your peace, to be fully persuaded of this principle: 'Once I know with certainty the truth of the Catholic religion in general, I at the same time know with certainty the truth of all its particular teachings, and I must no longer harbour objections.' St Thomas, in a great work of his, enumerates fifteen thousand objections against revealed dogmas, and resolves them all, one after another. Anyone who wanted to wait until he had studied all of them before believing would never believe; and on the way he would discover more. When a religion receives a direct demonstration, the objections can no longer have any force, even though we might never succeed in resolving them.

By way of confirmation of this great principle which logic suggests, I hope you will find time to read a little work of mind with the title *On the Limits of Human Reason etc.*, which is included in my *Philosophical Writings*, published in two parts and printed in Milan in 1827-8 [later reprinted in vol. XI of the *Collection of published and unpublished works* called *Theodicy* etc.] When you have read this, you may like to add one of the books of apologetics which demonstrate the truth of the Catholic religion in general so as to convince yourself that this religion is both true and wholly divine. I suggest you could begin with the *Conferences* of Mgr Frayssinous; or if you have already read this, with the *Philosophical Catechism* of Feller. Join all this with the reading of the gospel, which contains the actual words of our Lord Jesus Christ. Your own prayers and those of other good people will do the rest. It is already a great grace to have such good parents as yours. You can put the greatest confidence in them and derive from them much consolation. The prayers of parents for their children always have great power with God. If you like, when you have read the books I have mentioned, I will gladly suggest others.

Please give my respectful greetings to your father and mother, and be sure of the great esteem with which I sign myself -

Your humble and devoted servant,
A. R.

112. To the Capuchin Father Gianfrancesco Bustelli at Locarno

Stresa, 31 July 1843

Very Reverend Father in our Lord,

Unworthy though I am, I have made the *memento* in my Mass that you asked for, imploring the Lord to make you ever holier and consume you in his love. And now I must ask you to pray, as I constantly do, that God will convert me and once more guide me along the right road, despite the frequent obstacles I put to his mercy. He is infinitely good and patient; and so I do not grow discouraged, even though I should do so if I had to dwell on thoughts of myself. And if my hope is so strong, even though I am so amiss in corresponding to divine grace (and I say this not to put myself down but because I am forced to tell you the truth which is plain before my eyes), how much more reason have you to hope - you who have always lived in God and for God? Though it seems to me that when it comes to how much we may hope, we cannot raise questions about this or make any estimate of it. This is because God's mercy is infinite, and the basis of our hope is to be found not in ourselves but in that boundless goodness. Therefore our hope must also be unlimited, however good or wicked we are. Or rather, if we want to make a distinction, the wicked must rightly hope the more, since those who are poor can always look to receive a greater amount from the generosity of the rich Lord, and *our* Lord is the more glorified when he is liberal towards the wicked. This is why I look to receive even more than you, having a better title. I am aware that in your humility you will be reluctant to grant that I deserve this preference, yet what I say is very true. [Rosmini's rather tortuous argument is that since he is more 'wicked' than the Capuchin Father, he has the greater claim on God's generosity.] However we can decide the matter by each telling the other to place no limits to his hope. So let us both hope as much as we can and more, as men who desire 'the greater gifts' [cf. St Paul]. What do you say? Is it agreed? Do you want to enter into competition with me over the matter? I believe you do, and with such generosity that you will help me by your prayers to hope greatly. Without this help I cannot win the match against you!

For the rest, as regards what you tell me in your letter about the temptations you experience against the faith: do not believe that these really are temptations. Your faith is perfectly secure and unchanged in the depths of your soul. It was infused in you by baptism, and confirmed by the other sacraments. However, this does not alter the fact that you can still be subject to superficial anxieties and fears, and even apparent though not real doubts. God permits all these things so as to exercise the souls that are most dear to him so that they may be all the more vigilant and active in his love, and be purified by trials. Do not believe that there is danger in these things, or make too much of them. Instead, the more you discount them and see them for what they are - mere stirrings of the imagination and the feelings - the sooner they will disappear of their own

accord or become enfeebled. But if a person takes these things seriously and allows himself to think they are important (which is not the case), then his soul easily becomes disturbed: he is seized by great fear; and between the fear and the ensuing sadness, the result is to magnify a gnat until it looks like an elephant! In fact worse follows: the soul that is seized by empty fears sees what is not there, as the eye of a sick man may see illusions of red and black, depending on his condition. So put away all fear and anxiety, avoid overmuch reflection; do not make excessively scrupulous examinations of your conscience. Instead, make it your care to acquire holy *liberty of spirit*; let your thoughts dwell on joyful things, such as the infinite goodness of God, the heaven which awaits us; take moderate recreation, so as to afford some relief to your body too; abandon yourself wholly into the arms of God's mercy, and speak intimately to our dear Mother of Hope, our Blessed Lady. You must not have doubts, my dear Father. Thank God for everything - God who is with you and leads you on a sure road to his eternal embrace! And be mindful of the one who has the temerity to write these things to you - things that he has much greater reason to learn from you rather than pretend to teach them. But this is what you wanted: so what would in itself be temerity is changed into obedience. I send you my warmest greetings and ask you to give me your blessing.

Your humble and devoted servant,

A. R.

113. To Suor Scolastica Guglielmi, a Sister of Providence at Stresa

Stresa, 6 August 1843

My dear daughter in Christ,

If you aim at perfection, you must learn to draw spiritual profit from the company of the companions divine Providence has assigned to you, practising towards them the various virtues. It is both a mistake and an imperfection to entertain the thought that you can love God better when you are away from them. It is in practising virtue towards those like ourselves that we love God. True contemplation is nourished by holy actions. Jesus Christ has told us that charity is *his commandment*. I am writing you these few lines because I can see from your letter that you have a tendency to let yourself be deceived by your imagination and a *false idea of perfection*. You must be especially careful to avoid keeping to yourself, being solitary, and being excessively taciturn. Instead, mingle with the other Sisters, love them, esteem them, imitate the goodness in them, and sympathize with them in their troubles. Goodbye. May Jesus bless you all.

A. ROSMINI p.

114. To Brother Giuseppe Zaiotti at Stresa

Milan, 8 August 1843

My dear Brother,

I was hoping to speak with you before I left, but there was not time. So I am writing what I would have said face to face.

My dear Giuseppe, the time is drawing near for you to bind yourself more closely to the service of our Lord by the holy vows. This important occasion will mark the fulfilment of your desires, and your entry into a new state which is compared by St Paul to the promised Land and an earthly paradise. So make sure that you understand how great is the gift the Lord is making to you: enlarge your heart with feelings of joy and gratitude, and express these in hymns and canticles, in loving aspirations, generous resolutions and fervent promises. Before taking your vows you will spend a month in the holy recollection of a retreat; and let this be for you an acceptable time, a favourable time of salvation. Invite the Lord to visit you and live within your soul for ever; and with this in view, cleanse your house of all that is ugly, and prepare the room of your divine guest, beautifying it with the ornaments of all the most precious virtues you can find within your poor wardrobe. Above all, keep your thoughts fixed on this sublime guest so as to imitate him - imitate him in his childhood within the poverty of the stable of Bethlehem, in the patient labours of his preaching of the gospel, in his total self-dedication, and in his sacrifice on the cross. Here is your model: Jesus crucified; this is the example you look up to. Meditation, love, and fervent prayer - these are the means by which you will be able to copy him, to reproduce him in yourself. All good comes from him, from his loving heart, that open fountain of grace. But we have to exert ourselves to attain to that water of life, and unite to our efforts great faith and constancy. Our courage must never fail, because Christ, on whom our courage is based, will never fail us. We shall be supported, too, by our dear Mother Mary, who will make powerful intercession for us if we turn to her with tender devotion. Moreover we have as our advocates the angels and saints in heaven. So take fresh courage. It is during your retreat that you must lay the foundation of your own holiness: so let this thought accompany you. The vocation to which God has called us is great, and calls for great things from us. Finally, do not forget before the Lord -

Your affectionate brother and father in Christ,
A. R.

115. To Monsignor Claudio Samueli, Bishop of Montepulciano

Rovereto, 5 September 1843

Reverend Monsignor,

Your esteemed letter of 21 July overwhelmed me at one and the same time with consolation and embarrassment. How could I be other than consoled when I found within it the heartfelt expression of so much pastoral charity? But how could I fail to be embarrassed by your generous kindness? From all that you say it seems to me that the Lord has chosen you and sent you to this diocese for his own great ends and so that here you may do great things for his glory. You have already mentioned all the main things that a bishop can aim at in order to bring about the reform and promote the flourishing of his diocese: the seminary, the education of the clergy, divine worship, the administration of the sacraments, catechesis and the instruction of the people, the reform of morals, both public and private. And you, moreover, aware that a bishop has to act, do not fear, but hope that after the *hosannas* will be heard the cries of *crucify him*, knowing that the disciple is only perfect when he resembles his Master; which is as much as to say that the Lord has endowed you with not only the spirit of wisdom with which to plan, but also with what is no less necessary for a bishop: the courage and strength to put those plans into execution.

You have very good reason to put in the first place among your concerns that of the seminary and the formation of your clergy. On this, as on the first link in the chain, everything depends. And it seems to me that the principal matter which must be attended to is that of forming *holy priests*; for if this goal is attained, then wisdom and knowledge will follow of themselves. To this end, the practice of *daily meditation* according to a sound method, retreats, strict discipline aimed at separating the clergy from the world, preserving their recollection and making them love the house of God and the worship that takes place within it - all these are the means used by holy bishops; and it is these that you have in mind to aim at. Separating the clerical from the secular students (as you well say) is indispensable if the former are to be given a training suitable for their lofty vocation. The two books on ascetical theology that you mention are very good, and so too, I think, are Da Ponte's meditations, recently printed in Lyons (in two volumes, abridged). To these might be added Riccardi's *On the Spirit and Duties of Ecclesiastics*, the short versions of the works of Tronson and Arvisenet, the *Thesaurus for Priests and Clerical Students*, and similar works. But the most important thing is to appoint to the seminary a first-class Spiritual Director who will not only be holy and zealous, but will have a fine mind, so that he will be able to see to it that the good books on ascetics are put to good use by the students, and produce fruit. He must be a man of authority, next in rank to the Rector, and not too old, so that he can play an active part. There must be a harmonious relationship between him, the Rector and the lecturers. For the latter, the best-qualified people should be chosen, and they should be treated, after the Bishop, with respect, and given the highest salaries possible, so that these gifted people, placed in the seminary when young men, as teachers or in other posts, may come to love the place, be happy to grow old there, and form together a family united in the cause of learning, both ecclesiastical and general. This is the sort of

thing that was brought about by Barbarigo in his well-known seminary at Padua. It does not seem to me desirable, generally speaking, for priests to transfer from posts in the seminary to parish work, but it would be better if the best parish priests were to take up posts there. They would need to be well provided for in their old age - they could for instance take up canonries, or be made counsellors to the Bishop (if it is the custom there for him to nominate people outside the Chapter to such positions.) Indeed, it would seem highly useful for the Bishop to appoint and keep near him a group (large or small, according to the size of the diocese) of learned men to consult; and there is no more suitable place in which they could live together than the seminary itself. Anything is helpful which tends to unite the clergy with the Bishop and among themselves, to separate them from the world, to make them better informed on doctrinal matters through mutual exchange of views, and more at one in their moral outlook, and to preserve good discipline and sound habits of behaviour. Priests who mix a good deal together look after and help one another. This is particularly so if the Bishop honours (justly and impartially) the most upright and deserving of them, and they, through the authority thus acquired, act (as opportunity allows) as so many centres of unity for the rest. Again it is valuable if as far as possible parish priests are not left on their own but have assistants who also live in the presbytery. Further means by which to render the clergy united, strong and well-instructed are regular deanery meetings at which cases of conscience are discussed; and the appointment of excellent Vicars Forane who, having considerable authority, can inspire in the rest of the clergy a due respect. Union among the clergy is fostered by anything which favours a certain gradation among them, a sort of hierarchy, a fixed *organization* in short. But this can only be arrived at if there is on the one hand subordination and humility, and on the other hand real merit and authority in those who hold the higher posts.

Such attitudes of subordination and humility can only be instilled within the seminary, when the clerics are young and easily receptive, and so can learn to have respect and esteem for their seniors. But although it is right that such attitudes should continue to be found in the clergy, as they act in due subordination to the Bishop, the Vicars, the parish priests and their seniors, all the same this dependence is only facilitated when those towards whom they have to show it are chosen because of their real worth. So I think you will find it most important that a prelate should use the greatest impartiality in choosing people for the various offices, making use of no criterion except their merits and proved fitness. It is especially necessary to avoid appointing as parish priests men barely out of the seminary. They need to have practical experience first in the cure of souls as assistants under mature and able parish priests who can guide them and teach them in practical matters. In some places it is the custom to conclude the theological studies of the seminary with a course in *pastoral* skills. In this are taught the various duties of a parish priest, applying to these activities the theoretical knowledge previously gained. It seems to me that this practice is most useful when properly carried out. A very good compendium of pastoral knowledge and practice

is that of Padre Mauro Schenki. Several editions of this have appeared in German, and you may already know it.

The art of catechizing has its place in pastoral training. But it is important that clerics should be exercised in it from the beginning and learn to love it. This can be brought about by explaining to them the great worth of catechesis and giving them suitable guides to help them. A good diocesan catechism is particularly useful; and I have found in practice that if this is arranged according to the order of ideas, it is an immense help both to those who do the catechizing and to those who are being taught. In my view it is not possible to make a good job of teaching the catechism in parishes without introducing a 'society of Christian doctrine', adapted to circumstances and modifying the well-known rules of St Charles Borromeo. I saw the excellent results of this in my own parish on more than a thousand children distributed in various classes, but coming together for instruction. In the pastoral course, just as the administration of the sacraments is taught to clerics and young priests, so too they are instructed in the practice of the confessional. There are a number of ways of bringing out the importance of the office of a confessor: stressing the importance of the sacrament for the salvation of souls, and the merit gained by anyone who faithfully administers it, and the help it offers to his own salvation; making the practice of confession less burdensome by teaching clearly the principles involved, and showing how the frequent use of it is a help in resolving individual cases; putting forward the most zealous and experienced confessors as a guide to young priests; praising and rewarding those who show the greatest zeal in this ministry.

As for the reform of the people: you touch on the most important point, which is marriage, the beginning and foundation of the family. There can never be too much care taken to see that marriages should be contracted in a holy way. If every parish priest, suitably advised by the Bishop, insists - from the pulpit, in the confessional, in private conversations - on the sanctity of this sacrament; if they instruct the people about the necessary dispositions for it to be received worthily; if they show what benefits accrue to families from a holy marriage, and the ill effects of a faulty marriage; if they call these things to the attention of parents and oblige them to warn their children about the danger of excessive freedom in mixing with those of the opposite sex; if before admitting young people to the sacrament they firmly insist that they must know their faith and receive in good time the sacrament of penance - then doubtless the desired reform will come about. But one thing that will greatly contribute to this is the initiation of general missions arranged in one parish after another, given by really good preachers of the gospel who have previously been instructed by the Bishop about the main points on which they should insist, and the areas in which reform is most necessary. After these missions it would be most fitting if the Bishop himself, as supreme Pastor of the diocese, could visit the parishes, and by his words and the grace of his presence confirm and lend force to the work begun by the missionaries, set the seal on the good intentions

of those who had been converted, make a clean sweep of any evil customs among the people, and introduce everywhere good Christian habits opposed to these.

But I know very well, Monsignor, that I can only seem to be presumptuous when I come down to such details with you. But my pen ran away with me, and I do not want to cancel what I have so far written. I only ask your pardon for anything unseemly in my prolixity, and beg you to be so good as to take it all in good part, in that spirit of charity in which you asked me in your letter to express my views on the points you spoke of.

I come now to what I should have begun with: the matter you did me the honour of asking me to broach in this letter - I mean our Society. May the Lord bring it about that this Society may be of some help in the great aim you have in view: to cause to flourish more and more in your diocese piety, charity and sound teaching.

I believe you know that the Institute of Charity is made up of two main branches: first, there is the religious order linked by vows of obedience to the Provost General; and, second, there are a number of the faithful, ecclesiastical and secular, who do not take vows of obedience but are joined only by bonds of charity and the undertaking to observe the rules as long as they wish to remain ascribed members. This second branch, the *Society of the Ascribed*, serves to promote good even in those places where external obstacles prevent the introduction of the religious Institute. It is customary for the Bishop of the diocese to be the Protector and President of the Ascribed. And here I must thank you warmly for having consented to become a member of the Ascribed and for undertaking to act as their President in this region, as well as for letting me know that your clergy are so well disposed as to wish to form one heart with us - something I attribute entirely to the piety of their Pastor.

The Society of the Ascribed can be looked at from the point of view of its *beginnings* and of its subsequent *development*. As for its beginnings, it is so broad and general that any good Christian can belong to it. To make this possible it was necessary to make membership free from any obligations in conscience. So it is a purely spiritual union, a voluntary sharing in good works, a Christian friendship and fraternity. But this general union does not preclude its more fervent members from doing more: from joining together in pursuit of greater perfection. This is seen as something desirable and as a natural kind of progress and development.

Hence the Society in general is good in itself, and useful since it unites the faithful in Christ and increases charity, merit and the pursuit of good works. In this way, then, it forms a basis on which greater works can be carried out: it becomes the germ of other societies, more specific and closely bound together, and these are called *sodalities*. One of these sodalities foreseen by the rules is what we call an *Oratory*; but the others have no predetermined form; and the reason for this is that since the needs of the faithful and of the various dioceses are varied, as also are the spiritual initiatives to be found here and there, it is desirable that the sodalities should take shape spontaneously in different places in ways suitably adapted to circumstances and the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, which may move the Ascribed to choose and undertake

particular pious and charitable works. You will gather all this from the short book of *Rules*, of which I am sending you a hundred or so copies, and which should you so wish you could have reprinted. In this way the Bishop who presides over the whole work, can better direct the Ascribed to such particular ends as in his wisdom he sees most necessary. All that is needed for the formation of a sodality is that those Ascribed Members who wish to constitute one should enlarge their Constitutions in concert with the Bishop, and pass these on to the Provost General, who will by a decree give formal recognition to the sodality.

From all this, Monsignor, you will be able to see what can be done within your diocese. By starting in a small way one can slowly but surely produce something greater. I offer myself as wholly subject in obedience to you, and shall always be prompt to follow your directions. I should very much like to be so fortunate as to undertake to furnish your seminary with a Rector, teachers and prefects. But unless I am mistaken, the government of the Grand Duke would object to the sending there of religious of an Institute which that government has not yet recognized.

But it is high time I put an end to this very long letter. So with every token of respect, and asking your blessing, I remain -

Yours,

A. ROSMINI-SERBATI.

Provost General of the Institute of Charity

116. To Caterina Rosmini at Domodossola

Stresa, 20 October 1843

My dear daughter in Christ,

I was very pleased to hear that with the Lord's help you are overcoming the dislike which nature feels for the noviciate's retired and hidden life in God. To the soul that loves spiritual things this is a blessed life; but it is a severe trial to the flesh, to self-love, and to all our passions. All these have to be sacrificed, my dear Caterina, on the altar of the cross where your loving and faithful Spouse died. He has chosen you to be his companion in self-denial and mortification, as also in glory. And how dear it is to be in the company of Jesus, from whom comes the grace and the strength to enable us to do all things! We only have to ask him for these gifts.

Moreover it has been very good for you, even necessary, that at the beginning you should feel the difficult and arduous nature of the way of perfection, so that you can form a truer idea of what it means to follow Christ and aim at perfection, and change the former notions you had while you were still far away and in the world. When we are in that state we tend to be unthinking in our view, and not appreciate the truth that to follow Christ means the sacrifice of our natural inclinations. We also have to learn to

know our own weakness, and the great need we have to ask God with unceasing prayer to help us and to do in us what we cannot do ourselves. When we suffer trials and distress, we have to increase greatly the trust and hope we have in God and in our Lord Jesus Christ; and our efforts to hearten ourselves and raise our spirits by acts of generosity and courage must be all the greater the more the devil and the flesh try to beat us down and sadden us, by making it seem that the way of perfection is long and rocky, so that to make progress in it is impossible. But no, it is not impossible (though the devil will suggest this to our imagination with his lies) - rather it is very easy to those who love God, as was said by the Victor who conquered Satan: 'All you who labour and are heavily burdened, come to me and I will refresh you. For my yoke is easy and my burden light.'

So I am waiting, my dear Caterina, to hear from you ever better news. May your holy resolutions be stronger day by day, and your confidence greater; and at the same time may you experience ever greater graces. Let Jesus Christ be the sign impressed on your heart and on your arm. Amen. Pray for -

Your affectionate father in Christ,
A. R.

117. To Suor Maria Geltrude Amodini at Domodossola

Stresa, 20 October 1843

My dear daughter in Christ,

Since the Lord has placed you there as Superior, try this year to behave like a true Superior - i.e. with courage, strength and prudence. Prudence means that you should remedy things that are amiss from the very beginning, and not allow them to continue. Another obligation that follows from prudence is to take care to bring about the amendment of the Sisters entrusted to you and not permit any lack of observance of the holy rules. In this connection you should notify at once the Superior of the Central House in three cases: (1) when the Sister does not correct her faults, and her lack of observance becomes habitual; (2) if her defects are serious and harmful to the good progress and reputation of the Congregation; (3) if her faults, though not in themselves grave, are still such that harmful consequences are likely to ensue.

If in the previous year you were timid and hesitant over carrying out your duties, God will forgive you, because you were inexperienced. But this year, take courage in the Lord, and remember that as Superior you are his representative, and he will help you if you put your trust in him. Goodbye. Pray to Jesus and Mary for me.

Your affectionate father in Christ,
A. ROSMINI p.

118. To Don Giacomo Bernardo Mazzi in Rome

Stresa, 21 October 1843

My dear brother in Christ,

Your recent letters were full of quite excessive fears. You should know, my dear brother, that there is nothing I fear except sin: I am not afraid of gossip, or calumnies, since these can do me no more than temporary harm, and then only to the extent that the Lord allows, for my good. And what I say about myself you must apply also to the Institute. In short, my master in this matter (as in everything else) is St Francis de Sales; and it is something he said that I should like to put before you. To a M. Camus he wrote: 'I hear from Paris that they are tearing my reputation to rags; but I hope that God will restore it to me better than it was previously, if this is necessary for his service. For myself, I want no better reputation than I need for this. And this is because as long as God is served, what does it matter if this is done with good or evil fame, to the praise or discredit of our name? Let God do as he pleases about the esteem and honour that I receive - for it is all his, anyway. And if it is for his glory that I should be humiliated, should I not be glad to be brought low?

You can help me by praying for me, and by diligently passing on to me any news you can gather.

We shall be delighted when we receive the privilege of being able to honour Mary with the title 'Immaculate'. Goodbye.

Your affectionate brother in Christ,
A. ROSMINI p.

Rosmini had asked this favour of the Holy Father, and in the event he received it, with heartfelt joy.

119. To the Sister of Providence Suor Giovanna Mew at Domodossola

Stresa, 16 November 1843

My dear daughter in Christ,

Your little letter was a pleasant surprise, since it gave evidence of your progress in Italian, of your happiness, and of your zeal to acquire the religious virtues. You do not mention your health, so from this I hope that at present you are well. May the Lord encourage you and bless you, so that you may become more and more filled with the spirit of your holy Institute (which is a spirit of great mortification, self-denial and charity) and be able to take it with you back to your home country, when it is God's will

that you should return there. It will truly be a great benefit for England if you take with you a love of poverty, of self-contempt, and of generosity in suffering for Jesus Christ! And again how that country will profit if you work hard, weary yourself, even wear yourself out, all for the sake of educating in Christian virtue the many young girls who have so far been deprived of a school which can faithfully teach them to find the road to heaven! Reflecting on this should greatly stimulate you to become devoted to the study of your holy rules, to make a practice of faithfully observing them, making great account of this, and taking pleasure even in the least of them. I hope that you will remember me before God, as I always remember my daughters in Christ at the altar of the Lord.

The Father Director has not yet returned from Turin, so I have not yet been able to give him your greetings. Fr Signini returns your good wishes. Remember me to your fellow-novices and get them to say a 'Hail Mary' for me. Goodbye.

Your father in Christ,
A. ROSMINI p.

120. To Caterina Rosmini at Domodossola

Stresa, 16 November 1843

My dear daughter in Christ,

May God be blessed, for he comes to the help of his servants in their weakness when they put their hopes in him; he gives them his hand and raises them up, as he did to St Peter when he was terrified by the storm and felt himself in danger of drowning. He will come to the rescue of his faithful ones provided that they too call on him and cry out, 'Lord, help us, or we shall perish!' Yes, you are happy, my dear daughter, and I am more pleased than ever over this. I had no doubts about you, because I saw very well that you are not made for the wretched things of this world but only for those of heaven. I could see that what God wanted of you was (in the words of St Paul) that 'your conversation should be in heaven'. But you must not suppose that it will always be 'set fair' for you. Other winds will blow: you will face storms; but you will never meet with shipwreck, my dear Caterina, because Jesus Christ is the steersman of your boat; so all you have to do is to entrust your future lot into his hands. Oh, what a happy necessity is this - to abandon ourselves entirely to Jesus Christ who, even when he appears to be asleep, has a heart ever watchful over you, and over all those who trust in him!

I should like you and all my daughters in Christ to have always imprinted on your hearts this great truth: that 'it is enough to have complete confidence in your Spouse, Jesus Christ, to be utterly certain of victory over every enemy, and to arrive at the highest perfection, or - which is the same thing - at perfect happiness.' I say that *perfection* is the same thing as *happiness* since a spouse of Jesus can only desire to be perfect in his eyes; and what can then be lacking to her if, through his grace, she

succeeds in becoming perfect? So you must feel profound peace of heart, unlimited consolation, and perfect security in all eventualities. Confidence, yes, at all times and without limits: confidence when things are calm; the same confidence when storms arise, when you are well, when you are ill; when things are going well, when things are amiss; in the times of temptation and of trial which the Lord sends to those whom he loves; and in the end you are certain to be victorious, because it is Jesus Christ himself who triumphs in you. My dear daughter, draw great profit from your noviciate: make every effort to grow in love for holy poverty and for self-denial; in zeal for the salvation of your neighbour; in obedience and perfect submission, including that of the intellect, and in all the other virtues that form the spirit of the holy Institute you have embraced, and in love for its rules.

Goodbye. Pray for -

Your affectionate father in Christ,
A. R.

121. To the Sister of Providence Maria Carolina at Biella

Stresa, 18 November 1843

My dear daughter in Christ,

I was very pleased to receive your account of things, and I am glad to hear of the zeal of the Archpriest as regards the proper setting up of the school that you are going to open at the end of the month. All you need is a little courage, and all will go well. And courage is all the more necessary because Providence has given you the responsibility of managing the finances, so you will be obliged to keep up the courage of your companion too. And you know where your courage must come from: from complete confidence in God, in the mission he has given you, and in obedience. You will not be on your own there, because you have been sent by God. What a consoling thought that must be! All the same, this does not alter the fact that for your own part you have to use all the means in your power to make the work a success. And the two chief means at your disposal are *prayer* and *study*.

Thank the Lord for the safe arrival of the Sisters who left for England, where they arrived on 30 October [cf. Letter 124]. Pray to the Lord for me, as I pray him to bless you. Goodbye.

Your father in Christ,
A. ROSMINI
Provost General of the Institute of Charity

122. To the Baroness Adelaide Rosmini-Cristiani in Roveeto

Stresa, 18 November 1843

My dear cousin,

I am very grateful to you for your charitable work with the children of Sant' Ilario. You may be sure, my dear cousin, that by doing this work you will be more and more blessed by the Lord, who said: 'Whatever you do for one of these little ones who believe in me, you do for me.' What your modesty makes you say, when you protest that you are not learned, must be yet one more stimulus to go on with this generous activity, since the old saying reminds us that: 'Anyone who wants to learn must teach.' As for supervising the teaching at Loreto: if the Archpriest offers you this position, take it, provided Giuseppe agrees, and do not put forward any objection. Occasions of doing good, my dear cousin, are graces from God, and we must never refuse them. I believe Giuseppe will be content over this - the more so as he considers seriously such principles as, 'to do good is to acquire good', and 'whoever does much for God receives much from God.' I know that there are things that he desires, graces he needs to ask the Lord for. So he must be generous in everything that concerns the service of God and of his neighbour.

Give my greetings to all my friends, and my affectionate good wishes to Giuseppe. Goodbye.

Your affectionate cousin,
A. R. p.

Baroness Adelaide Cristiani was the wife of Antonio's brother, Giuseppe Rosmini. She was a wise and pious woman who engaged in many good works. When her husband died in 1863 she spent the rest of her life in retirement, prayer and various pious activities. She went to her rest in Christ on 29 May, 1906.

123. To the Sister of Providence Paolina Tamburini in Domodossola

Stresa, 24 November 1843

My dear daughter in Christ,

The rules for the novices which you sent for my inspection seem to be suitable, and I am returning them with a few slight changes of expression and small additions. Send them now to the Superior so that they may be preserved in the House Diary as having been approved. Put them into practice at once. Later I will send you the *Rules of the Mistress of Novices* which I am now putting together. Make every effort to sanctify your pupils, and infuse in them a great spirit of self-denial, mortification, charity and the purity of intention which should distinguish the holy Institute to which God has called

them. At the same time try hard to see that they profit from their studies, love these out of love for God and their neighbour, and willingly endure the necessary hard work. They must realize that a Sister of Providence cannot fully live up to her vocation unless she does all she can to fit herself to be a good teacher and educator. I hope you will get our novices to offer up a Holy Communion for me. Goodbye.

Your father in Christ,
ROSMINI p.

124. To the Sisters of Providence Francesca Parea and Anastasia Samonini in Loughborough, England.

Stresa, 24 November 1843

To my beloved daughters in Christ: may the strength and consolation of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you, and may all honour and glory be his for ever. Amen.

May the Lord be blessed for bringing you safe and sound to the field in which through his great love you have been destined to work, imitating him in his constant mortification and his apostolic labours. There you will be able to co-operate in the salvation of so many poor souls who are in danger of being lost, and in this way bring about also your own salvation! Yes, my dear daughters, there could be no better means given to you to assure that salvation than to be thus torn away from your native country and sent to a distant land where you will meet with a foreign tongue and different customs - a land where the people are attached to material and corruptible things and separated from the unity of the true Church. What an immense grace you have been given by the Lord! What graciousness your Spouse Jesus Christ has shown you! What gratitude you owe him for having chosen you, two poor and inexperienced women, to do so great a work for his glory! Paradise has been brought within your reach: if you wish, it is yours; you can easily become saints, great saints, if you profit by such an opportunity.

We have been truly consoled to read your letters (particularly your description of the journey) which we awaited eagerly. We have thanked the Lord for everything; and the help you have received so far is a pledge of the greater things that he wishes to do for you, his servants, if instead of thinking about your own weakness you put your trust in him alone. It is certain that you will receive graces from God in proportion to the faith and trust you put in him. As I said, your own weakness must not in the least dismay you: rather, you should see it as a victory for the glory of Jesus Christ who is pleased to use human instruments who in themselves are of no account. So take courage! Go ahead boldly, having always imprinted on your minds the thought that: 'if there is anything evil in you it comes from yourselves, but if there is anything good, it comes from God.' So it should not surprise you no matter what weakness you feel in yourselves, for you

are capable of all evil; but neither should you be surprised at the great and holy things you are able to do, because it is God who works these in you, and the glory is owed to Jesus Christ alone. Your part is to feel overwhelmed at being so graciously treated by him, through no merit of your own.

On the other hand, be careful not to think too badly of the things and persons around you: suspend judgement and withhold blame, so that you may never fall into making rash judgements. In a strange country we do not at once see things aright: but gradually we learn to appreciate them more justly. Do not worry about tomorrow, but concern yourselves only with doing as much good as you can today. Be grateful and respectful towards the lady who is your benefactress - to whom you have already expressed and must express anew my humble respects. Devote great efforts to learning English; and if you are able to do anything useful in the school (under the direction of the Superiors there) show yourselves most willing and active. Should Father Pagani see fit to employ you among the sick, give yourselves wholeheartedly to the work. Remember that you have been sent there to exercise charity; and only if you show a tireless and unlimited charity will you be able to get people there (who still dwell in darkness and the shadow of death) to realize just what the Catholic religion really is. The love which our holy religion inspires in its faithful followers is the radiant proof of its truth; and it is this love which often convinces even the most obstinate of opponents. This is why Jesus Christ wanted the commandment of love which he taught (not simply to our ears but to our hearts) to be the most beautiful and pleasing mark of his true disciples. I do not have to tell you that this love must begin in yourselves, because I have no doubt that you are most closely united by it, so that you support and encourage one another and are, in a word, of one heart and one soul.

I pray that our Lord will bless you, and I am -

Your most affectionate father in Christ,
A. R.

In October 1843 these two Sisters had been sent to England to found their Institute there. They established themselves in Loughborough, which from the beginning became the centre of the activities of the Sisters of Providence in England.

125. To Father Giovanni Sallier at the Charterhouse of Collegno

Stresa, 28 November 1843

. . . Your letter, Reverend Father in Jesus Christ, both consoled me and embarrassed me. I was consoled, because the charity of God's servants, which diffuses itself like a sweet odour to all, known and unknown, always brings ineffable consolation and refreshment to souls, especially those who are weary and wretched; and your letter overflows with this charity. But I was also embarrassed and humbled, because you speak of the work of

God, to which in so many ways I constantly put obstacles, with my faults and my daily imperfections. I am telling you the truth; and I the more readily confide it to you as to a brother I do not know in the flesh, but do know in the spirit, through the sentiments I see you to be animated by. And I confess myself to be a poor wretch who groans continually over himself, and finds no way to correspond to the boundless gifts of the Lord and the patience with which he supports me. Rather, I discover only the ways in which I offend him, resist him, and go against his infinite goodness, putting one obstacle after another to the great designs of his divine mercies. I want you to know these things, since God has called you to that holy Institute which has chosen the better part, and since (as you say) you are eager only to further through prayer the work of the divine mercy, you can give me enormous help if you will obtain from the good God the grace, at once truly effective and overmastering, which will convert me wholly and for ever, and put an end entirely to my infidelities and my resistance to God. How happy I should be were this hour of grace to sound !

I am here with my hands busy with the many good works the Lord has given me; yet those hands are unable to carry them out well and are all too apt to ruin them. Indeed I do spoil them, and make them fruitless. What wretchedness this is, and how it humbles my poor soul. Again, my many occupations take time away from the prayer which alone could give me strength, courage and consolation. So do, my good Father, take pity on me and speak at length of me to God, and of my affairs, which concern the salvation of many people - since unfortunately my own demerits must inevitably prejudice the good of very many of my neighbours. So I put my hopes in your charity. God who inspired you to write that letter will move you also to offer him powerful pleas for me. Perhaps it is his will to make me holy thanks to your prayers.

My dear Father, receive kindly the sentiments of sincere piety and devotion with which I sign myself -

Your unworthy servant in Christ,
A. R.

126. To Don Clemente Alvazzi at the Sagra di San Michele

Stresa, 14 December 1843

My dear brother in Christ,

Your letter was most welcome; it is a sure sign to me that God loves and protects you. The admirable frankness which you show in it is a most sure way of overcoming the enemy. That insidious serpent, once he is discovered, is dismayed and put to flight; and God then rewards the soul that is candid and sincere. However, in my opinion your temptations deserve for the most part to be despised rather than anything else. Take your mind off them, become absorbed in your holy duties, and you will have won. Remember that a man has only one thing of intrinsic importance to concern himself with: *his duties*.

It is indeed a great and beautiful saying: *carry out your own duties and nothing else*. Acting on this sublime principle, a religious gives no further thought to what his Superiors or brethren ought to do. And if his mind should inadvertently stray towards such thoughts he corrects himself, saying to himself at once: ‘this is wretched vanity: think of yourself: think of your duties and not those of others. They must answer to God for what they do. In these thoughts you will find your holiness and peace of mind.’ In this way he cuts short no end of temptations which stem from thinking about the defects of others. If he follows these principles a true religious makes no comparisons between himself and his own brethren; and if his mind tries to run on such thoughts he at once says to himself: ‘comparisons between yourself and others are of no help to you; whether others are in a better or a worse state than you has no bearing on your own sanctification. The rule you need to observe is not to be like others but to be like Jesus Christ.’ So in this way the conduct of others is no longer a cause of scandal to you; nor does it influence for the worse your own behaviour; nor does it upset or disquiet your mind. And again, acting on this principle, a true religious keeps clear of honours or dignities; and if his imagination (which is always inclined to vanity) suggests that he might occupy in religious life this post or that position, he at once chases away this thought, born of vanity, and says to himself: ‘you proud fool, ought you not to submit to the judgement of your Superiors, which is that of God? Are you not the most unworthy and imperfect of all? What are you looking for *outside your duties*? If you fulfil these you are pleasing to God, you will gain heaven; you will be happy now and at the time of your death. But if you look for higher positions, this is conceit: you will be seeking your good outside your duties, you will risk being lost.’ So again, accepting these principles, a true religious is dead to the world: he prays for his own family, but leaves their temporal affairs to God, and does not get mixed up in them himself. If real need arises, he hands over the situation to his Superiors, and then looks no further. For his real family is his religious one, where he has his true fathers, brothers, beloved relations. The genuine religious says: ‘my thoughts must not be occupied with my earthly family, my relations by blood; I must turn my attention to the holy obligations of my state, my religious duties. These are everything for me.’ To be free of the temptations which may arise from the family, it helps greatly to have a great love and esteem for his own Institute and the people and things within it. Consider this as the earthly paradise to which God has brought you after having created you.

To finish, let me say that I am much consoled by you, for I hear that you have gone out on the mission. I should so much like to see you become a good missionary! Happy you, if you gain souls for the Lord! But you need to study and prepare well your sermons. Knowledge of dogma is needed first, and then logical thought and a good style. I hope you will make great progress. May the Child Jesus bring you every consolation. Goodbye.

Your brother in Christ,
A. R. p.