



ROSMINI
PUBLICATIONS
2017

A brief biography
of
**Blessed
Antonio Rosmini**

*Philosopher, Theologian, and
Spiritual Master*

Founder of the Institute of Charity and of
the Sisters of Providence

ANTONIO ROSMINI 1797-1855

Antonio Rosmini, founder of the Institute of Charity, was **born on 24th March 1797 at Rovereto** in the Italian Tyrol. His parents were rich and of noble descent. Antonio was one of three children: he had an elder sister **Margherita** and a younger brother **Giuseppe**.



PIER MODESTO



GIOVANNA



The first entry in his “Personal Diary” – limited to few, important spiritual events – reads thus:

*“1797, March 24/25 – God gave me the grace to be born on the Vigil of the Feast of the Annunciation, thus showing **His will to give her to me as Mother and Helper** as I have always experienced her to be notwithstanding my ingratitude.*

Moreover, the Good God, qui prior me dilexit, favoured me by granting to be reborn in the saving waters of Holy Baptism on the feast day of the Annunciation of the Angel to the Virgin Mary”.





Self-Portrait

Antonio had the good fortune of living a happy childhood, full of innocent fun, open to **warm and lasting affections**.

The Rosmini household, which included servants and tutors, loved and kept for life, was a **very traditional Catholic family**, where faith and devotions issued naturally and powerfully.

The centre of the big mansion was the **chapel**, used daily for prayers and meditation; and yet, **Pier Modesto** was keen that the family should take part fully in Parish activities and participate in the social and cultural life of the community of Rovereto, where **they enjoyed great prestige and authority**.



Uncle **AMBROGIO**

Antonio manifested an immense love for learning, spending hours in the family library reading ancient and modern classics, with a keen eye for the **great works of philosophy and theology**, and acquiring an immense erudition. It was his **closest friend Manzoni**, the greatest Italian writer at the time and himself a voracious reader, who said, *“There seems to be no book that Rosmini has not read!”*



**Alessandro
MANZONI**



Rosmini's LIBRARY at Rovereto

In 1813, when he was 15,
Rosmini wrote in his diary,

*“This year was for me a
year of grace. God
opened my eyes over
many things and I knew
that there was no true
wisdom but in God”.*

It was the year of his
decision to become priest,
shattering the dreams of his
aristocratic parents who had
made other plans for him.



THREE EXTRAORDINARY SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES IN THE LIFE OF BLESSED ROSMINI

1813: In GOD alone is true Wisdom

1815: The WORD is the Light that
enlightens every one

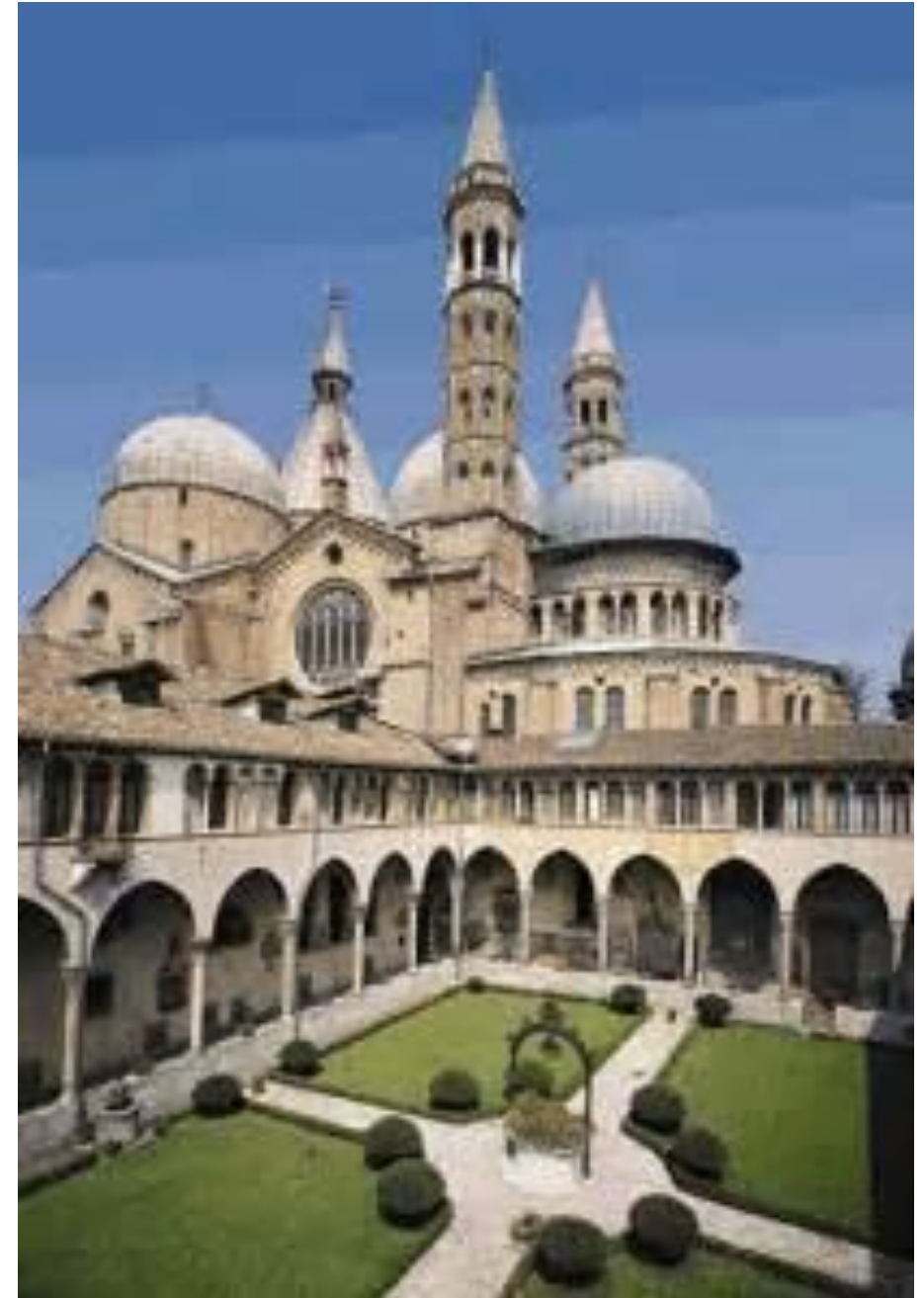
1821: GOD IS GOD: Divine Providence
(Passivity and Indifference)

Antonio's parents tried to dissuade him from the priesthood by asking a priest to talk to him, with the result that the priest, having listened to Antonio, became a strong supporter of his decision with his parents, who finally and grudgingly gave in and granted their permission.

Pier Modesto, still dreaming great things for his son, tried to persuade him to do his theological studies in Rome, where he had good connections who would help him to pursue a successful Church career.

But **Antonio chose the University of Padua** and on 22nd November 1816 he moved there with three other close friends to an apartment near the **Basilica of St. Anthony**.

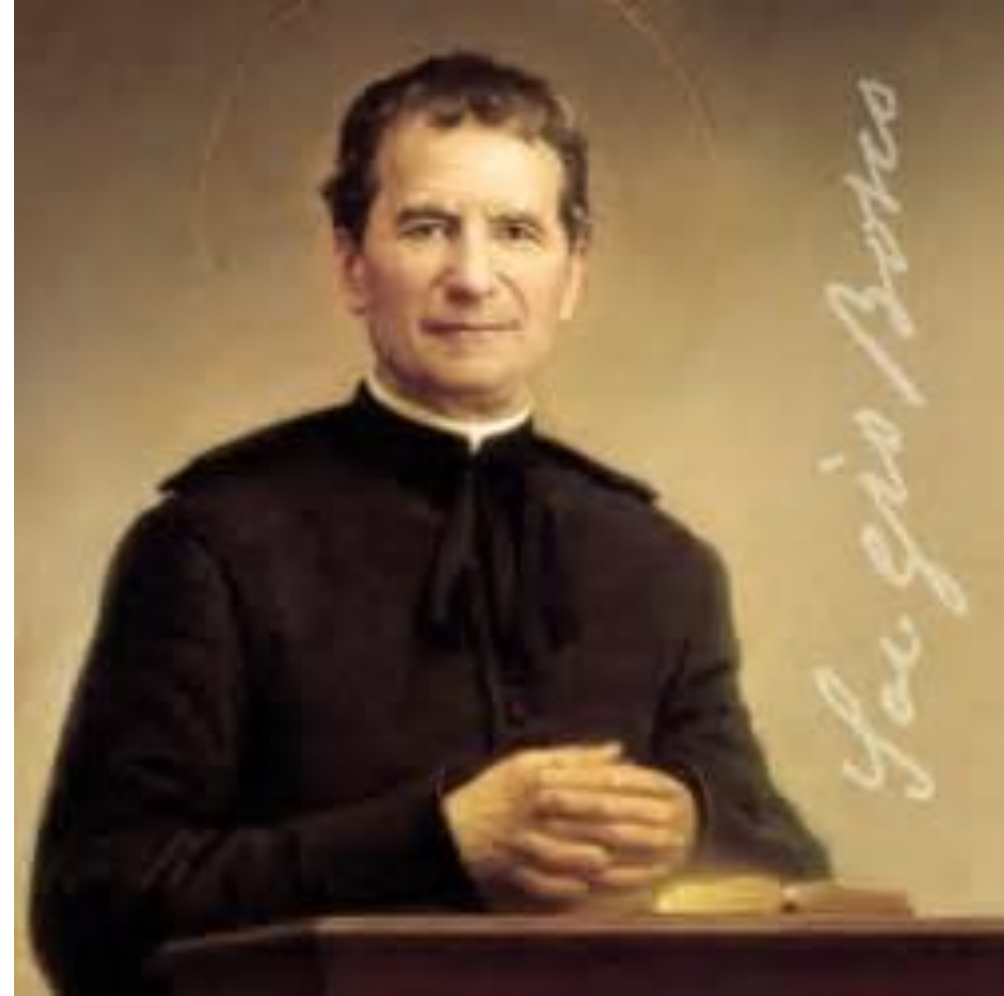
The three years he spent in Padua strengthened even further his passion for intellectual and theological matters, engaging in serious, extensive research, visiting and debating with lecturers, buying, as far as his finances allowed him, precious books for immediate use or for his library of Rovereto.



Pier Modesto died in 1820, leaving to Antonio most of his possessions and titles. To manage the considerable patrimony, Antonio employed his mother's nephew, Count Francesco Salvatori.

Antonio was most generous with his money, especially with the poor, but also in supporting all worth-while initiatives of the authorities in Rovereto, and, at a later date, using it to finance various works of charity of the Institute.

He helped St. John Bosco on a number of occasions and financed the setting up of a printing house to help the "street children" Don Bosco was gathering in those days in Turin.



Antonio was **ordained priest on 21st April 1821 at Chioggia** near Venice since his own diocese of Trento was still waiting for the appointment of a new Bishop. It was a most important occasion for him, and of all the titles, the only one he will use for the rest of his life after **his signature will be “priest”**.

He wrote in his diary: *“From this hour onwards I must be a new man, live in heaven with my heart and mind, converse always with Christ, despise and flee from earthly things. I must return from the altar a saint, an apostle, a man full of God, I must progress in all virtues and be the first in love of hard work, humiliation and suffering”*.

The way he celebrated Mass left a great impression on people. St. John Bosco told a young priest, *“I do not recall seeing any priest say Mass with such devotion as Fr. Rosmini. One could experience his most lively faith, source of his charity, goodness, modesty and exterior gravity”*.



Chioggia or “little Venice”

After his ordination in 1821, Rosmini withdrew to his house in Rovereto, and dedicated himself fully to his studies, and to meditation and prayer.

It should have been a time for immersion in the many projects enthusiastically discussed and embraced during the previous years; instead, there was not a mention of them in any of his letters, diaries, or writings of that time. What had happened?



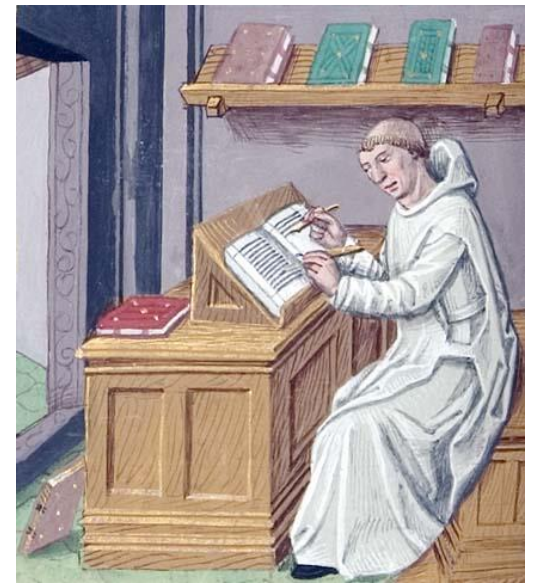
Martha, Martha, you worry about too many things.

However, only one thing is necessary.

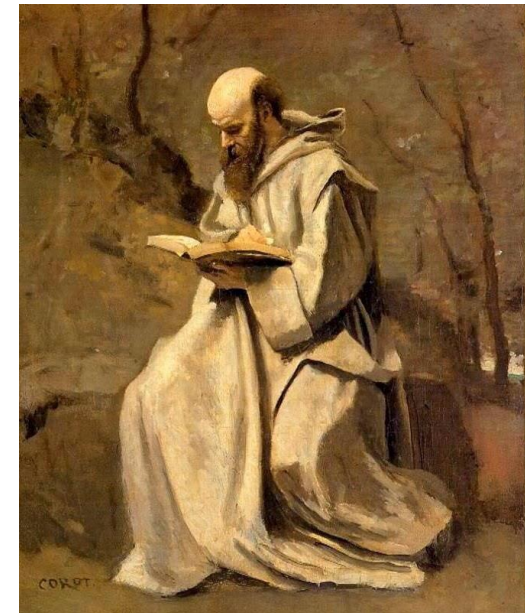
Mary has chosen the better part.

This was indeed a tremendous shift for Rosmini, up to now an enthusiastic source of ever new and more daring projects and activities; moreover, **was not the newly ordained priest expected to begin in a flurry of activities for the benefit of the people of God**, and in defence of the Catholic doctrine? Was he not expected, at the very least, to work in a parish as a curate?

Instead, he remained at home, immersed in prayer and work. **He had given a very hard look at his spiritual situation, and had discovered in the depth of his conscience that, perhaps, all his activities and projects so far had not come from God but from himself, that God had allowed the failure of all his projects to teach him to wait for Him “in silence and hope”.**



ORA ET LABORA



From **1821 to 1828** Rosmini chose the **CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE**, dedicating himself to prayer and to his studies, at Rovereto first and then in Milan.

He lived what he called **“the principle of passivity”**, and this is how he described it:

“To think seriously about correcting my enormous vices and purifying my soul from the evil which weighs it down from birth, without looking for other occupations or undertakings on behalf of my neighbour for I see that it is completely impossible for me to do anything of myself to my neighbour’s advantage”

The three stages of the
Contemplative Life according to
Fr Antonio Rosmini:

1. **PURIFICATION
FROM SIN**
2. **PRACTICE OF THE
VIRTUES**
3. **INTIMATE UNION
WITH GOD**

This effort should be constant, all through our life, even when we are engaged in APOSTOLIC ACTIVITIES.

We should be at all times on Mt.
TABOR and on Mt. CALVARY

From 1828 till the end of his life in 1855, Rosmini lived the **APOSTOLIC LIFE**, immersed in intense apostolic work.

This is the time of his founding of the Institute of Charity and of the Sisters of Providence, this is the time of dedicating himself totally to pastoral work as Parish Priest in Rovereto, this is the time of his dealing with Bishops and with the Brethren for the opening of new religious Houses in Italy and in UK, this is the time of his Mission journey to Rome on behalf of the King of Piedmont, this is the time of intense controversies over his philosophical and theological writings.

He never ceased to be a “contemplative”, but he embraced **the second principle of his spirituality, which he called the “principle of Indifference”**.

Both principles spring naturally from
**“ABANDONING ONESELF COMPLETELY
TO DIVINE PROVIDENCE”**.



In 1821, Rosmini had met the saintly Magdalene of Canossa who had invited him to found the Sons of Charity, the male branch of her Institute of the Daughters of Charity. He had read the Constitutions that the holy woman had already prepared, but he was hesitant, not sure about the will of God for himself.

For Rosmini that meeting marked the beginning of his religious vocation as a founder of a new Institute in the Church. There were further meetings and correspondence (1821-1825) as they sought the moment and means for putting the plan into practice.

There was one point, in particular, that divided them: Magdalene had expressed her conviction that the Sons of Charity had to be a society of lay brothers, humble and dedicated to the poor and free from parochial and ecclesiastical responsibilities; Rosmini, instead, wanted a mixed society of priests and brothers, asking Magdalene to *“please consider carefully the dignity and sublimity of the pastoral care of souls, instituted by our Lord in the Church”*.

The 10th December 1825 was the *“day of enlightenment”* for Rosmini. He marked it by an entry in his Personal diary and another in his Diary of Charity:

“10th December 1825. On this day I conceived in a flash the plan of the Institute of Charity” (Personal Diary).



The providential event that finally set in motion **the founding of the Institute of Charity** is described by Rosmini in his Diary:

“8 June 1827 – I met Giovanbattista Loewenbruck in the house of Count Giacomo Mellerio. He suggested that we found a society for the spiritual formation of the clergy; I spoke to him about my idea of the Society of Charity. A few days later Fr. Luigi Polidori, after praying before the venerated image of our Virgin Mother in the church of St. Celso, suggested the Sacro Monte Calvario in Domodossola as the place for the beginning of our society. We agreed to use the retreat house that his Eminence Cardinal Morozzo bishop of Novara put at our disposal”.

Fr. Loewenbruck was a larger than life fiery Frenchman, always ready to work hard, sincerely well meaning, and inflamed with zeal for the salvation of souls, but also rather unpredictable and chaotic. Divine Providence made use of him to finally set Rosmini on the task of founding the Institute of Charity. After a few days together, asking for advice from well known religious priests in and around Milan, the two agreed to meet at **Sacro Monte Calvario, Domodossola, on 20th February 1828** to start together in prayer and fasting the Institute of Charity.



Sacro Monte Calvario





Rosmini's Cell at Calvario

Rosmini made arrangements for his probable prolonged absence from Rovereto, and arrived at Calvario of Domodossola on 19th February 1828.

The following day was Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent: there was no sign of Fr. Loewenbruck, and so he began an intense period of prayer and fasting by himself, in the most wretched conditions, in a freezing small room, with a bed made up of leaves, and a cabinet for writing.

He started in earnest to write the Constitutions of the Institute of Charity which he completed on 22nd of April.

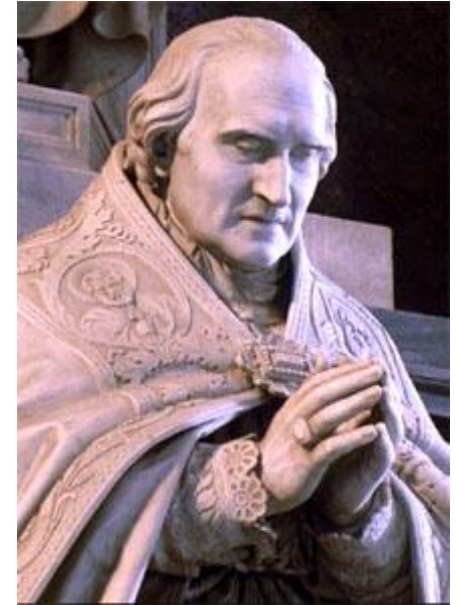
From the end of **1828 till 1830** Rosmini was **in Rome** for two major tasks:

1. To seek confirmation from the Pope that he was doing the will of God about the founding of the Institute and the writing of books;
2. To publish his foundational works on Spirituality and Philosophy, i.e. the **MAXIMS OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION** and **A NEW ESSAY CONCERNING THE ORIGIN OF IDEAS**

Pope PIUS VIII told him clearly and affectionately to go ahead with both:

“It is the will of God that you write books, this is your vocation. The Church has a great need of writers, I mean, solid writers so extremely few in number. In order to influence people usefully there is no other means today but to take them by means of reason, and by this means to lead them to religion. Be assured that you will benefit your neighbour far more successfully by writing than by exercising any other work of pastoral ministry”.

“Concerning the foundation of the Institute, go ahead and let Divine Providence be your guide”.



PIUS VIII



During the 1830s, the Institute of Charity grew at a steady pace, and not only in Italy. In 1835, in fact, Fr Luigi Gentili was sent to England, and through his heroic efforts, he established the Institute there, and later, in Ireland.

Rosmini therefore sought its formal approval by the Holy See, and after lengthy discussions he received the great news of its approval on Christmas day, and wrote immediately to brethren and friends alike, *“How good is the Child Jesus, He has given us today a great gift, adding happiness to happiness”*.



GRACE DIEU
MANOR in UK



Fr LUIGI GENTILI

Pope Gregory XVI, in the Apostolic Letters formally approving the Institute of Charity, appointed Rosmini as first General Superior and then praised the holy and learned priest of Rovereto with the following words, extremely unusual in a public document addressed to the whole Church:

“Our beloved son, the priest Antonio Rosmini is 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, conspicuous for his wonderful love and loyalty to the Catholic religion and to this Apostolic See” (Pope Gregory XVI).



Rosmini never wavered in his total commitment to the tasks imposed on him by Providence through the Holy Father.

However, **he soon became the target of a small but very influential section within the Church that opposed by all means, including slanderous accusations and secret circulation of libel books against him, his openness to dialogue with the culture of the time,** his willingness to step out of stereotyped, arid, mechanical formulas in order to present Christian philosophy and theology in a language that made sense to the modern world.

Rosmini is a modern day writer, dealing with our problems, and approaching them not from a theological standpoint, but from clearly argued logical steps.

His writings can be read profitably by believers and non-believers – as they are led forward by the light of reason.



ST. AUGUSTINE

Instead of the traditional way of starting from God to arrive at man, he decided that it would be more beneficial to all honest seekers to meet them at their level, starting from man to lead them progressively to God, in line with the **“Itinerarium mentis in Deum”** of St. Bonaventure (the journey of the mind to God), or St. Augustine’s prayer, ***“Lord, you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it finds rest in you”***.



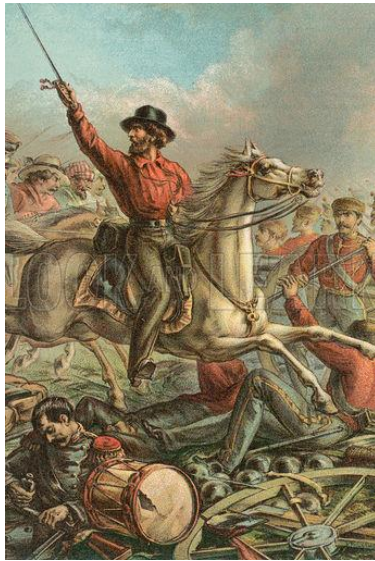


PIUS IX

In 1848, Pope Pius IX welcomed Rosmini in Rome with the words, *“You did not want to come to Rome to be near the Pope. Now that God has sent you here we shall keep you in prison and never let you go”*.

The “prison” the Pope had in mind for Rosmini was the position of Cardinal, and towards the end of August Rosmini was asked officially to prepare to be made Cardinal in December.

There were reliable rumours that on that occasion he would also be appointed Secretary of State.



ROMAN REVOLUTION 1848



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Rosmini's status in the Church had never been higher: he dined often with the Pope, he was sought by him for advice, he had meetings with ambassadors and diplomats discussing the confederation, he presided over negotiations between the Holy See and the kingdom of Piedmont, and he was making all the necessary arrangements for his imminent promotion to Cardinal.

Within a very short period of time, however, things began to change dramatically. On 15th November 1848, the Prime minister of the papal states was assassinated at the start of an insurrection in Rome. There were protests by angry crowds, and a new revolutionary government was set up.

Rosmini himself had been nominated President of Parliament and minister for Education, positions which he declined at once having been signed by the Pope under duress.

A week later, the Pope left Rome in disguise and travelled in the middle of the night for Gaeta, guest of the king of Naples. He had given orders to Rosmini to follow him with Gabriello Mastai, the Pope's brother. The Pope was treated with great honour by the king and the people, prompting him to stay there rather than accept the invitation of the king of Spain to find refuge in Spanish territories.

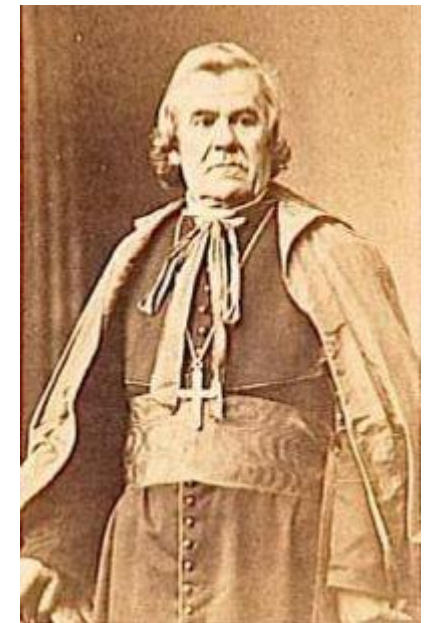
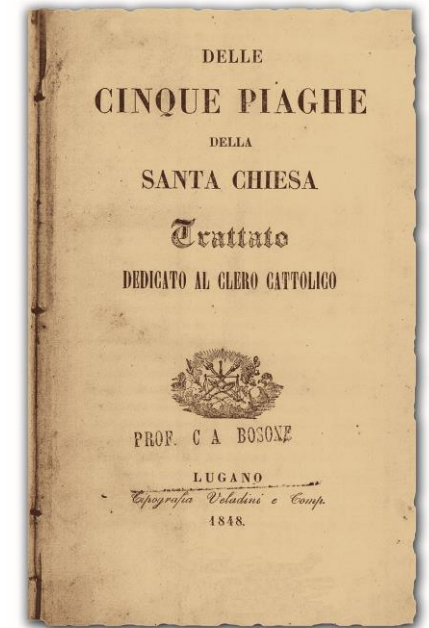


For the first few days, the Pope sought constantly Rosmini's advice, who was urging him not to take a strong reactionary line against his people and not to put his trust in foreign powers for his return to Rome.

But the Pope was no longer the free man he had been in Rome: the trauma of the insurrection, the fears and anxieties of the exile, the very limited circle of cardinals available for advice all played into the hands of **Cardinal Antonelli**, a staunch supporter of Austria, an enemy of the constitution that had been granted, and opposed to all recent liberal approaches taken by the Pope.

The Austrian ambassador, welcomed in Gaeta by Antonelli like a saviour, considered Rosmini “*the evil genie of Pius IX*”. It became evident to Antonelli that everything had to be done to discredit Rosmini in the eyes of the Pope and to impede him from seeing the Pope.

Various means were used for the purpose: Rosmini found access to the Pope almost impossible, the police of the kingdom of Naples started to harass him in many ways, and, moreover, there began a sustained campaign against his recently published book, “*The Five Wounds of Holy Church*”.



Writing to Fr. Pagani, Rosmini confided,

“Let us thank the Lord who allows that I should become the target of people who have great influence on the Pope. I know that every effort is being made to have two of my books placed in the Index, *The Five Wounds* and *The Constitutions according to Social Justice*.

They will succeed, since I have no one to defend me. I will submit to the condemnation with the greatest sincerity of heart. I know that they will not let me see the reasons for the condemnation; a Cardinal has assured me that there are no errors”.

The Congregation of the Index met in great secrecy in Naples on 30th May 1849, presided by a cardinal who had always been opposed to Rosmini.

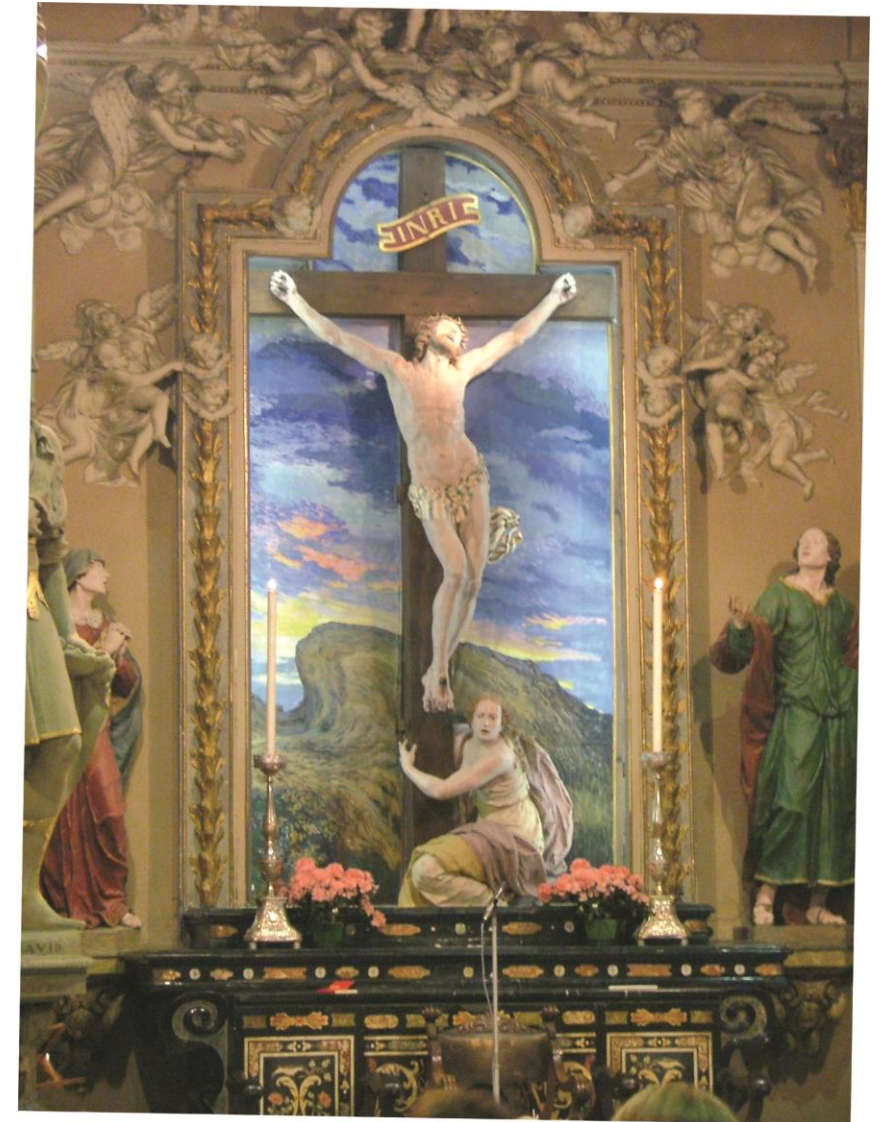
It issued a condemnation of **The Five Wounds** and of **The Constitutions according to Social Justice**, signed by the Pope on 6th June. Yet, three days later, when Rosmini had a meeting with the Pope, he was told nothing about the condemnation.

He received the news of the condemnation at Albano on 15th August 1849. He submitted immediately, writing,

“By the grace of God, I have always been at heart, and publicly professed myself to be a most devoted and obedient child of the Holy See. As such, I declare that I submit to the prohibition of the named books purely, simply and in every best way possible.

And I beg you to assure our most Holy Father and the sacred Congregation of this”.

Rosmini expressed the same testimony of faith and obedience to the many people who wrote to him during this time.



The Crucifix at Sacro
Monte Calvario

The consequences of the prohibition of the books proved extremely serious both for Rosmini and for his Institute.

One immediate consequence was that his opponents took heart from the signals coming from Rome and began a sustained attack on him and on his writings, along the lines we have seen earlier.

*PERSECUTED
PROPHET*

*OBEDIENT
PROPHET*

**(Titles of books
stressing Rosmini's
obedience, forward
looking writings,
and intense
persecution)**

Pius IX finally intervened to put an end to the persecution against Rosmini by repeating the order of silence of his predecessor and by setting up a commission to examine carefully all the works of Rosmini.

The commission was set up in answer to worries expressed by the bishops who had read the hostile books written by some Jesuit priests; but it did not displease Rosmini either, who felt that he had nothing to fear from a thorough, scientific investigation of his books from truly learned men steeped in sound doctrine.

The work of the Commission was truly enormous given the great number of books to examine, and the difficulty of the topics. The Pope himself had selected the 16 members, and they worked for a period of over three years.

On 3 July 1854 there was the final session presided by the Pope himself, a very rare occurrence, with the presence of 8 Cardinals in addition to the 16 members of the Commission.

The verdict was extremely clear:

“The works of Antonio Rosmini are declared free from errors”.

The comments of some of the members had been most telling: Fr. Caiazza, for example, had praised enthusiastically the philosophy and theology of Rosmini, and Fr. Trullet found his view perfectly in line with the views of St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure, and compared Rosmini’s work to the works of the great Fathers of the Church, from Augustine to Ambrose.



Casa BOLONGARO in STRESA

For most of his life Rosmini had been weak in health, and the stress of the years when his orthodoxy was under suspicion undermined his frail constitution.

From the beginning of May 1855 his condition deteriorated considerably and was forced to bed. As the news of his grave illness spread, there was a continuous flux of friends who came to pay homage and to hear once more his wise words.

He welcomed everyone with a smile and words of comfort, raising their mind immediately to the goodness and love of God. He left to **Manzoni** his spiritual will, *“Adore, Be Silent, Rejoice”*.



Tommaseo, one of his great friends, came to receive the very last goodbye. He knelt at his bedside asking with tears his blessing;

“The Lord will give you His blessing – said Rosmini as Tommaseo grabbed his hand raised in blessing to kiss it – *on our part let us think first of all about the great work of saving our soul”*.

Strengthened by the last Sacraments and the special blessing of Pope Pius IX Antonio Rosmini died in the early hours of 1st July 1855, the feast of the Precious Blood which was his favourite devotion. His body is buried in the chapel of the College at Stresa, and over his tomb is inscribed the eulogy that Pope Gregory XVI addressed to the whole Church in the Apostolic Letters approving the Institute in 1839:

“Our beloved son, the priest Antonio Rosmini, founder of the Institute, is 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, conspicuous for his wonderful love and loyalty to the Catholic religion and to this Apostolic See”.



Rosmini died at the age of 58. There is some evidence that he may have been poisoned a few months before his death whilst in Rovereto.

However, his life achievements are truly impressive:

- He is the Founder of the Institute of Charity and of the Sisters of Providence;
- He wrote over 100 large volumes on Spirituality, Philosophy, and Theology and many articles in various learned papers;
- He wrote over 13 volumes of Letters, addressed to a huge variety of people, from the highly learned, members of the aristocracy, and political leaders to the most humble persons. Religious, Cardinals, and Bishops, diocesan priests, and lay persons received inspired words of wisdom which still today have a great impact on people.
- He was a holy parish priest at Rovereto, and he opened many Houses for the Institute in Italy, France, and UK.
- He undertook a difficult mission on behalf of the King of Piedmont to discuss political matters with Pope Pius IX.
- He spent hours for many years as a spiritual guide to hundreds of people of all walks of life.
- He was admired by Popes and many future Saints for his holiness and his attachment to the Church.

The Institute of Charity is present today in the following Countries:

Italy
UK
Ireland
USA
Venezuela
India
Kenya
Tanzania
New Zealand

On 18th November 2007, Antonio Rosmini was made a BLESSED by Pope Benedict XVI. We are celebrating this year the 10th Anniversary of his Beatification.

