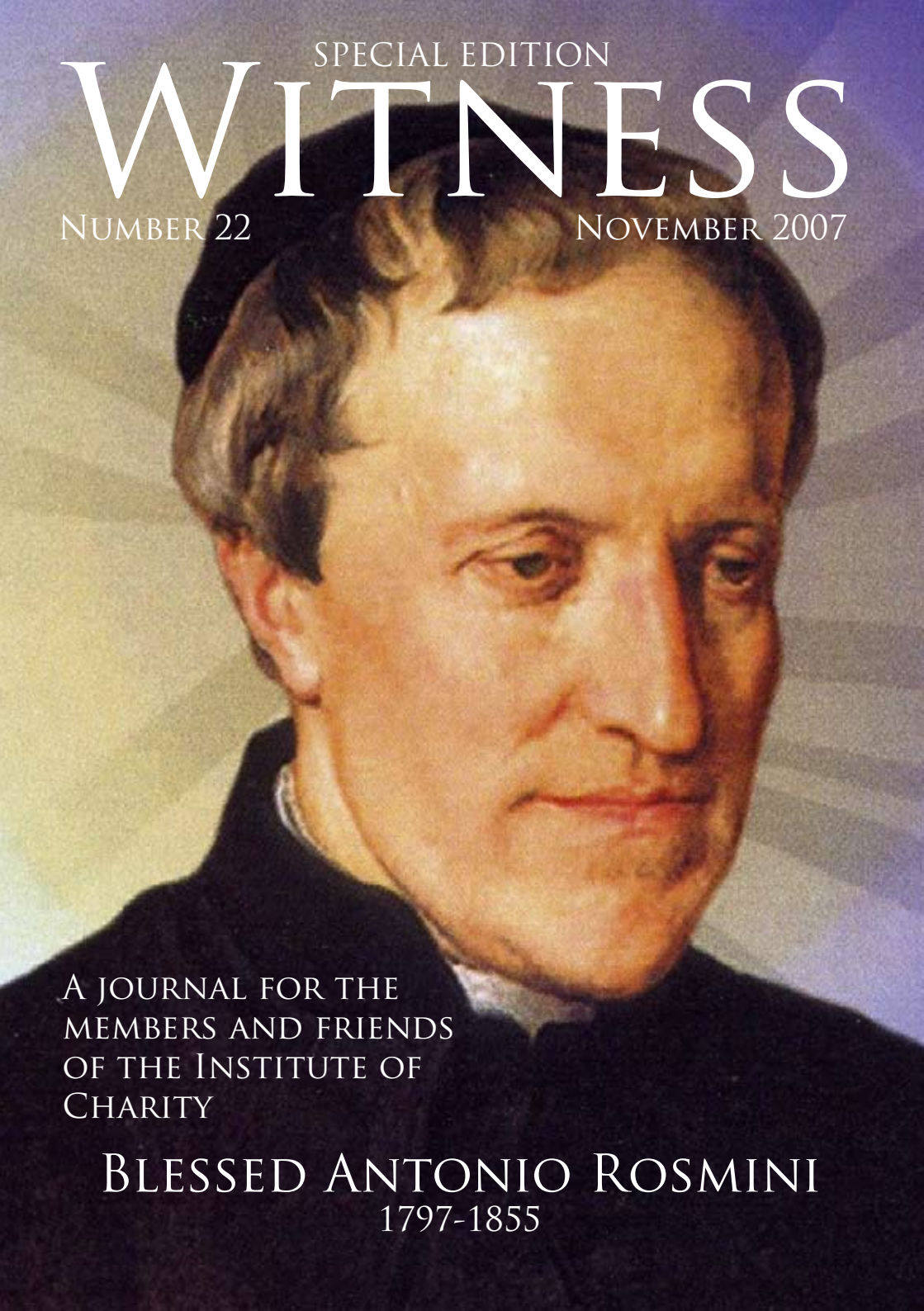


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MEMBERS AND FRIENDS
OF THE INSTITUTE OF
CHARITY

BLESSED ANTONIO ROSMINI
1797-1855

CONTENTS



A BRIEF LIFE OF BLESSED ANTONIO ROSMINI

INTRODUCTION	4
Chapter 1 - Early Life & Studies	8
Chapter 2 - Vocation to the Priesthood	12
Chapter 3 - The Principle of “Passivity”	19
Chapter 4 - The founding of the Institute of Charity	22
Chapter 5 - At Rome: the blessing of Pope Pius VIII	29
Chapter 6 - Expansion and Formal Approval of the Institute of Charity	32
Chapter 7 - First Controversy 1840-1843	39
Chapter 8 - The Roman Mission 1848-1849	45
Chapter 9 - Further Persecutions and the Dimittantur 1850-1854	52
Chapter 10 - Rosmini’s holy death at Stresa, 1st July 1855	57

ROSMINI PHILOSOPHY

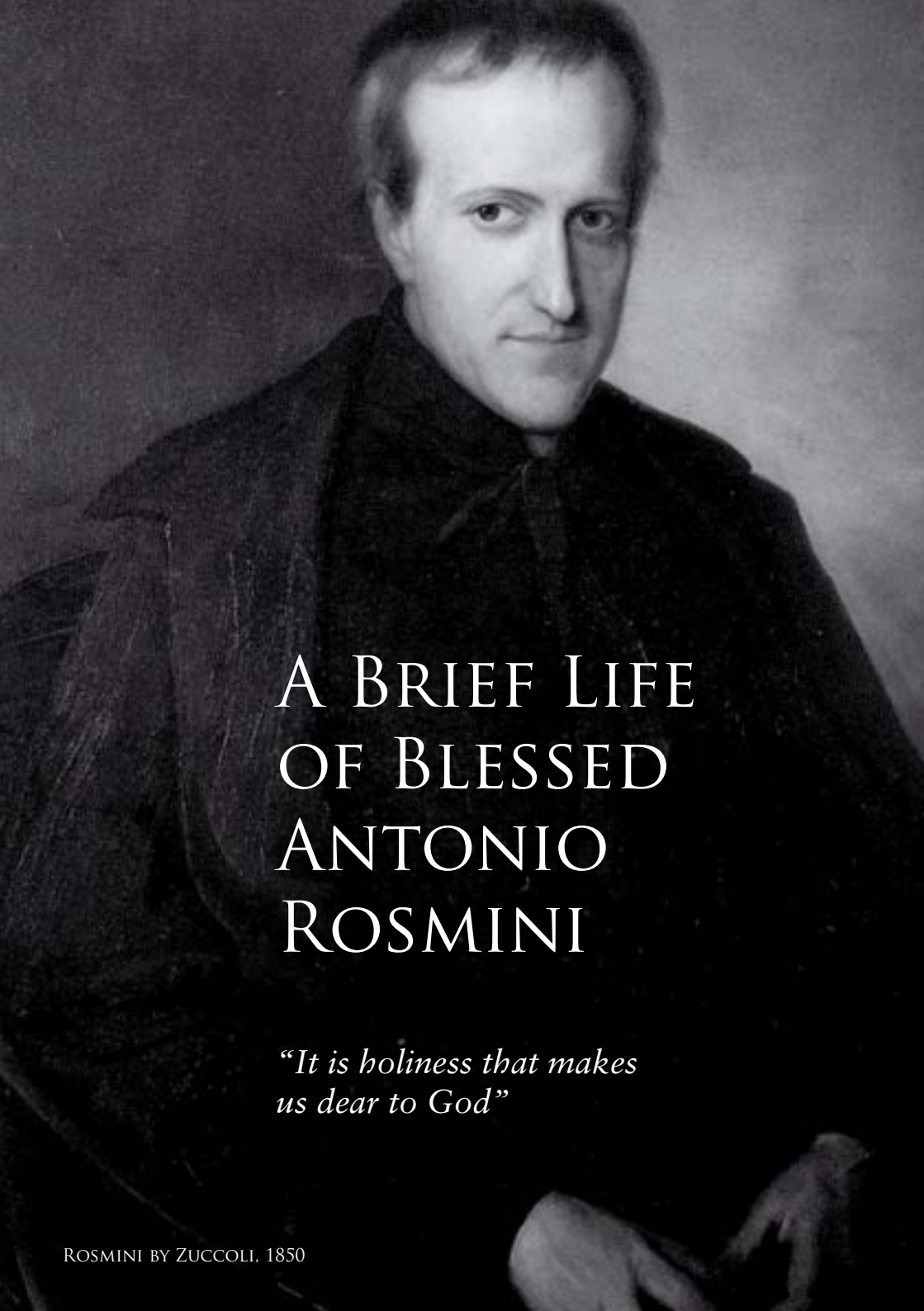
Chapter 1 - The “Rosminian Question”	63
Chapter 2 - What are the main issues of philosophy today?	67
Chapter 3 - Is there an objective, universal Truth?	72
Chapter 4 - The Human Person	83
Chapter 5 - Person and Morality	94
Chapter 6 - Education	99

THE SPIRITUALITY OF BLESSED ROSMINI

Chapter 1 - Holiness (<i>1st Maxim</i>)	108
Chapter 2 - Love for the Church (<i>2nd Maxim</i>)	117
Chapter 3 - The Call to Serve the Church (<i>3rd Maxim</i>)	126
Chapter 4 - Divine Providence (<i>4th Maxim</i>)	140
Chapter 5 - Acknowledge our Nothingness (<i>5th Maxim</i>)	144
Chapter 6 - The Will of God in Daily Life (<i>6th Maxim</i>)	149

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A black and white portrait of Blessed Antonio Rosmini, a man with a serious expression, wearing a dark, high-collared coat. The background is a soft, light gray.

A BRIEF LIFE
OF BLESSED
ANTONIO
ROSMINI

*“It is holiness that makes
us dear to God”*

INTRODUCTION

Blessed Antonio Rosmini died on 1st July 1855, on the feast day of the Precious Blood of JESUS. Found on his bedside cabinet was a worn-out booklet of personal prayers entitled, “*Jesu Christi Passio*”, containing some devotions to the Precious Blood of Jesus given to him by St. Magdalene of Canossa in the distant 1821. He had written on it, as a reminder to himself:

“The Commemorations in honour of the most precious Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ are to be recited daily, so that our own blood may be offered to the heavenly Father in union with that of Jesus”.

In the Constitutions, the foundation book of the Institute of Charity and of the Sisters of Providence, Fr. Rosmini established this devotion as proper to his sons and daughters:

“The offering of our blood in union with the Blood of Jesus our Redeemer is an act of piety for which we shall have a special love. We desire this offering to be made frequently. Each one should make the offering with humility, fearful and trembling on his own account, but greatly comforted through his hope of union with the Blood of Jesus, our God and Lord. He may suffer considerable apprehension

(for the offering must not consist in external words only) from the thought that the Father may accept the offering of a sacrifice that he himself cannot consummate. If so, he should commend and abandon himself wholly into the hands of this most loving Father...” (Const.762)

Few doubt that God accepted the sincere offering that Fr. Rosmini made of himself to Him daily, for love of the Church and of humanity. His “martyrdom” started in earnest, continued for all his life, and was carried forward by his sons and daughters until very recently. Pope John Paul II acknowledged the “*extraordinary trials*” that afflicted Fr. Rosmini, adding, “*It was through such trials that his holiness was made perfect and he became a witness of how to love the Church, work for the Church, and suffer for the good of the Church*” (10 November 1988).

The Beatification of Fr. Rosmini is a great event for the Church: it is not only a public expression of the heroic virtues of the Servant of God that make him a model to imitate and that allow the faithful to publicly venerate him, but it is also a full acceptance by the Church of his spirituality and charism, and a solemn declaration that the spiritual

path traced by him is in accordance with the Gospel and leads to Christ.

Thus, the beatification of Fr. Rosmini is both the closing of an era and the beginning of a new one. The long, dark days of the “Rosminian Question”¹ have been swept away by the light shed by the Documents of Vatican II and the subsequent statements from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, especially the “Nota” issued on 1st July 2001 by the will of John Paul II and with the signatures of the Cardinals Joseph Ratzinger and Tarcisio Bertone:

“The reasons for anxiety and doctrinal doubts that prompted the promulgation of the decree “Post Obitum” – [condemning 40 propositions taken from works published mainly after Fr. Rosmini’s death] – are now to be considered obsolete, since it is clear that what was thought to be motivation for doubts and difficulties does not belong properly to the authentic position of Rosmini”.

It has now become obvious to every unbiased Catholic philosopher or theologian that Fr. Rosmini’s vast literary production not only does not contain anything which is not in perfect accordance with the doctrines of the Church but that it actually makes a tremendous contribution for a deeper and clearer understanding based on strong and solid philosophical and theological principles.

It was the late Bishop Riva who wrote, when called to be a “peritus” during the sessions of Vatican II, *“Many think that Antonio Rosmini has his place among the ranks of great men. Whether this is true or not, it is certain that in following the comments of the various commissions of the Council one becomes aware of the fundamental harmony between the teaching of Rosmini and the numerous points brought to light by the Fathers of the Council. Sometimes one could see in his teachings the reply to problems occupying the Fathers in their discussion”* (Riva, in *Charitas* 1965-1966)

Fr. Rosmini himself had anticipated the happy conclusion in the midst of the storm, when he wrote to a friend, *“This is my most firm persuasion: the Church will examine all my writings, and not only she will find my doctrines pure and sound, but she will contribute with her judgment to make them even more useful to the public”*; and again, *“I will wait trustingly for the day when the Lord will calm the wind and the sea. What beautiful and clear day I can see after the terrible storm”.*

The beatification is also the beginning of a new era. Fr. Rosmini is an extra-ordinary man, whose life was lived fully in the light of truth and the fire of charity. Popes Pius VII, Pius VIII, Leo XII, Gregory XVI had indicated to him personally as the will of God the double mission of restoring Catholic philosophy and theology by writing books in

¹ see page 63

order to bring people to Christ by means of reason, and to establish the Institute of Charity (and the Sisters of Providence) in order to increase temporal, intellectual, spiritual charity at the service of the Church and of humanity.

He fulfilled his mission dutifully and with great passion and zeal, until his death. He wrote over 100 books on philosophy and theology covering all major aspects of particular sciences, epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, philosophy of right, philosophy of education, politics, anthropology, psychology, theodicy, supernatural anthropology, theosophy, and many others. Taking his prompt from his definition of philosophy as the “*science of ultimate reasons*”, his investigation dealt with the ultimate principles that are the source and origin of each dependent science, deducting logically secondary principles and applications.

His system of truth, characterised by “*unity*” and “*totality*”², constitutes a most formidable system of Christian philosophy not inferior to the great systems produced by St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, both revered by him as his teachers and guides, with the advantage that he had acquired a most profound knowledge of all modern philosophers as well, from Locke and Hume to Descartes, from Kant and Fichte to Hegel, drawing from them every scrap of truth but criticising ruthlessly their deviations from the truth.

The beatification imposes once again and with greater urgency on the members of the Rosminian Family the responsibility to make known to the world the holiness of life, the works of charity, teachings on spirituality, theology, and philosophy of their Founder. He is a man of extreme relevance today who can shed significant light on many of the problems that confront peoples and cultures.

John Paul II, only a few years ago, reminded the Rosminians of their fundamental mission: “*As the Church prepares to enter the third Christian Millennium, she regards the evangelisation of culture a vital part. You Rosminians have the specific mission to indicate the path of freedom, of wisdom, and of truth, which is always the path of charity and of the Cross. This is your religious and cultural vocation, no less than it was the vocation of your far-seeing Founder*”.

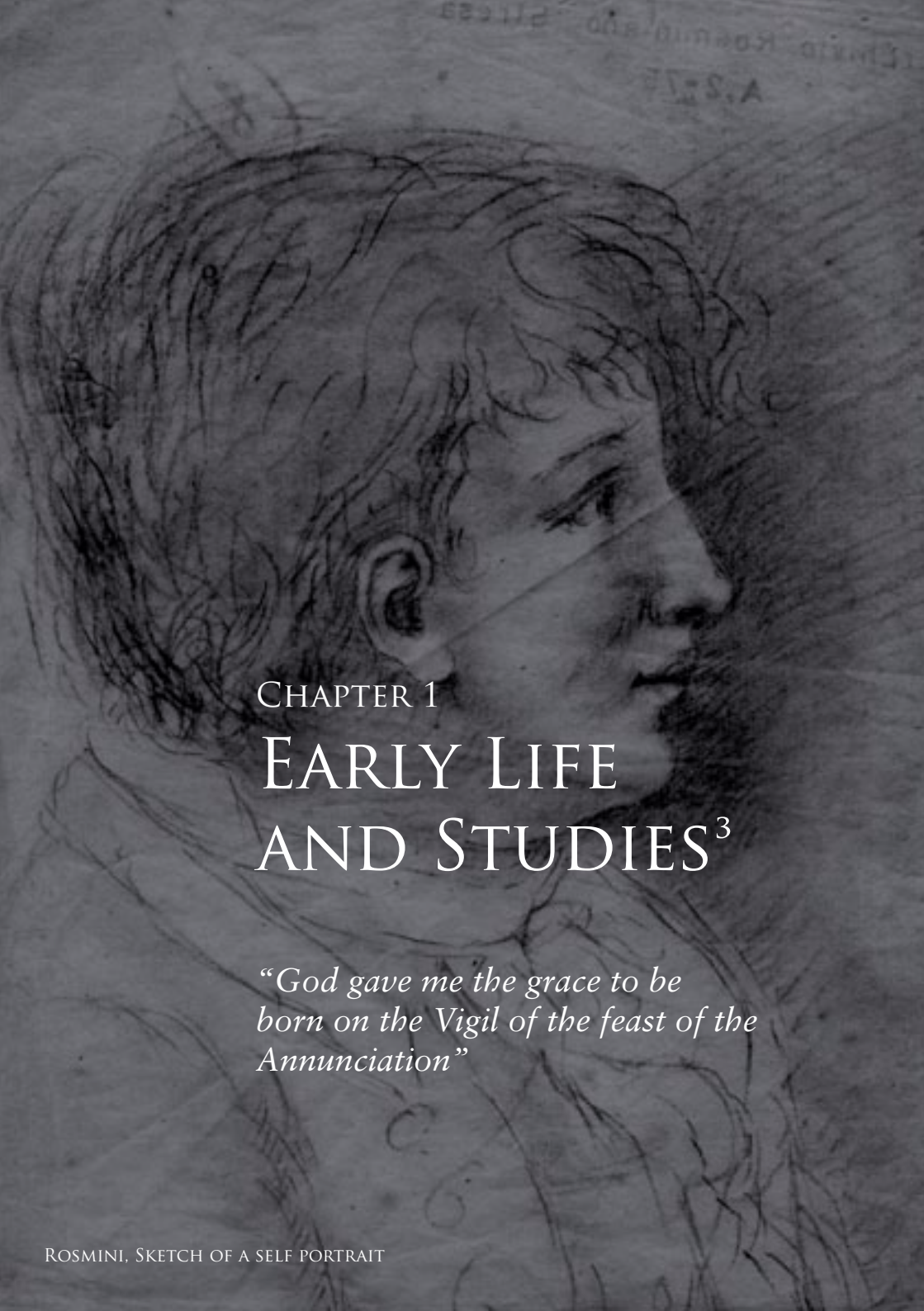
This booklet is meant for the general public as a means of providing some basic information about the life and work of Fr. Rosmini. Although detailed written material on Fr. Rosmini is abundant and easily available, many friends of the wider Rosminian Family, in our Parishes, Colleges, and other works of charity, often ask for a simpler, brief, but accurate presentation of the life and teaching of Fr. Rosmini.

The major events of the life of Fr. Rosmini will be examined with a view of presenting the holiness of the man the Church is giving us as a model worthy of imitation. The second section will endeavour to present in a simple but relevant way some of the main teachings of Fr. Rosmini on Philosophy, Theology, and Spirituality, avoiding as far as possible complicated and abstract language.

It may be appropriate to end this introduction by quoting the prophetic words of Pope Paul VI in 1972:

“Rosmini was a great man, too little known today. He was a man of great learning and wisdom... His thinking and spirit ought to be made known and imitated, and perhaps he himself should be invoked as a protector in heaven. We look forward eagerly to the day when that will happen”.





CHAPTER 1
EARLY LIFE
AND STUDIES³

*“God gave me the grace to be
born on the Vigil of the feast of the
Annunciation”*

Antonio Rosmini was born at Rovereto, a small town in Trentino then part of the Austrian Empire, on 24 March 1797. The Rosmini Family enjoyed great wealth and belonged to the nobility of the Empire. The father, Pier Modesto, was an upright, austere, and conservative man, faithful to Austria and with a keen interest in the affairs of his town. The mother, Giovanna dei Conti Formenti, was an amiable woman, discrete, warm, educated, and with a keen eye for the administration of the family's wealth; she looked after her children with wisdom and had a lasting influence on Antonio. *"You have as mother the most gifted woman I know"*, wrote to him Tommaseo, a famous Italian writer and a life-long friend since their days at the University of Padua.

Antonio had a sister, Gioseffa Margherita, three years older than himself, a dear friend and companion, sharing with him not only childhood games but, more importantly, spiritual and Christian interests and ideals; she became a Canossian sister and died at Verona in 1833, at the age of 36, consumed by her love for God and neighbour. On that occasion, Rosmini wrote, *"I did not think it possible for one to experience such a great sorrow"*.

His brother Giuseppe, one year younger, displayed instead an awkward and difficult personality; he married at the age of forty, at the insistence of Antonio, but left no children. The last son of Pier Modesto, born three years after Antonio and called Felice, died during the first year of his life.

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 great 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.

Above the altar of the chapel at home, there stood a beautiful Crucifix painted by Antonio's uncle Ambrogio, his father's bachelor brother who lived with the family. Uncle Ambrogio was a very learned man, gifted as a painter and architect,

³ see page 153

and passionate about culture generally. He soon realised the extraordinary natural gifts of Antonio and encouraged him from a very early age to cultivate his highly inquisitive mind and hunger for knowledge, introducing him to the substantial collection of books in the family library.

By the age of five, with the help of his tutor, he had learnt to read and write, practising on the Bible, The Acts of the Martyrs, and The Lives of Saints.

Although it was common for aristocratic families to have their children educated at home, Pier Modesto insisted that his son should attend the public schools in Rovereto, to show his support for the educational endeavours of the civic authorities. Antonio completed successfully the ten years of his formal education, revealing clear signs of precocious extraordinary talents.

During the same period, his immense attraction for knowledge found vast scope in the rich library at home, where he spent most of his time, reading and researching, with the help of Uncle Ambrogio. Faithful to three resolutions made when he was 11 years old, which he kept for the rest of his life, he endeavoured

to finish every book he started, always took abundant notes, and never wasted a moment of his time.

He thus became fully acquainted with all the works of the Fathers of the Church, the history of the Roman Empire, the works of Plato (in Latin), and all Italian and Latin Classics. There is no doubt that by the age of 16 Antonio had laid the foundations of an immense erudition, later prompting his friend Manzoni, the greatest Italian writer of the 19th century and himself a voracious reader, to say in admiration, "*There seems to be no book that Rosmini has not read!*"

Since Rovereto had no College for Further Education, the nearest ones being either in Trento or Verona, Pier Modesto and other wealthy parents decided to set up a private class in Rovereto for the further education of their children, under the direction of the learned priest Pietro Orsi.

Physics, Mathematics, and Philosophy were the main subjects and Antonio fell in love at once with the new disciplines, engaging in profound research and lively debates with his tutor and friends. He manifested a most intense love for Philosophy which he defined to a friend

as *“the greatest, first and fundamental study, the starting point and key to all the others”*.

The text used for Philosophy lessons had been written in Latin by S. Karpe, a follower of Kant, and although it was regarded by the students as *“extremely boring”* it caused a great desire in Antonio to learn German to read the works of Kant, Hegel, Fichte, Schelling, in their original language. Thus, he was able to acquire a most profound knowledge of the German philosophers that will help him engage in strong critical debates with them until the end of his life.

He wrote in a letter, at a much later date, *“The Germans possess a wealth of philosophical investigations, more than any other nation, but they get lost in a web of synthetic thinking deprived of the light of analytical*

thinking, and thus they become lost in systems which are indeed highly sophisticated and daring, but also very dangerous for young intelligent people... But, I am convinced at the same time, that for strong minds steady in their faith, the reading of the works of Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel can produce great benefits, for they truly manage to lift up the spirit, with the danger always, however, of leading it to empty pride”.

The two years of private lessons concluded with a public examination in the Imperial Lyceum in Trento, in August 1816. Rosmini's results were outstanding, and the comment of the examiners was, *“He has made eminent progress in all disciplines, and is a youth of great distinction and gifted with powerful intellectual ability”*.



Rosmini's room at Rovereto

A black and white portrait of a man, likely Rosmini, with a serious expression, looking slightly to the right. The background is dark and textured.

CHAPTER 2

VOCATION
TO THE
PRIESTHOOD

*“There is no true wisdom
but in God”*

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”.

The grace of Baptism and the protection of Mary were highlighted by Antonio as the most important factors of his birthday, expressing the centrality of the supernatural in his life. His childhood and adolescence were dominated in a natural and spontaneous manner by God, the most important Member, in a sense, of the Rosmini household. Rosmini grew up with the greatness of God before his mind, prompting him to love Him, serve Him, and praise Him.

As a child, he impressed everyone for his deep piety and love of God. Mrs. Fogolari, who lived

opposite the church of St. Mary of Loreto, testified with great admiration how she would see *“every morning the child Rosmini kneel down in prayer on the step outside the church on his way to school”*. It was as a child that he learned from his mother to make the sign of the cross and to recite the Credo as soon as he was up from the bed, a custom which he maintained for the rest of his life. The chapel was at the centre of the life of the Rosmini household, with morning and evening prayers, the Rosary, and other devotions.

A special time of grace was reported by Antonio in the entry on his Diary in 1813:

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

The Rosminian poet Clemente Reborra believed that we can identify three essential moments of the work of the Holy Spirit on the soul of the young Rosmini, and that the special experience of 1813 is the first of them:

“The first exceptional moment of grace – when he was 15 years old – was the moment of his spiritual enlightening: “... I knew

that there is no true wisdom but in God". *From this initial experience of "real" being came to him his boundless humility, his clinging lovingly to truth, his limitless love for charity in harmony with being, his abandoning himself completely to the Providence of his Father in Heaven*".

"The second moment, a consequence of the first, is that of his intellectual enlightenment, his discovery and persuasion that ideal being is the first principle of all knowledge, the first truth, the source and principle of certainty. His philosophy has its roots in this initial experience [Rebora is referring to Rosmini's discovery of the "idea of being" and of its wider implications, in 1815, when he was 18 years old].

"The third moment, is the emergence of his asceticism through the experience of "moral being", when at the age of 24 and soon after his ordination to the priesthood, God led him to "open his eyes over himself" and to discover the "principle of passivity" which became the foundation of his spiritual life and which implies in effect a constant interior activity of purification and an openness to the voice of God to do His will as soon as it pleases Him to

manifest it to him" (C Rebora, Rosmini, p. 186).

Thus, for Rebora, the discovery by Rosmini and his profound meditations and understanding of the three modes of being – ideal, real, moral – rested on special perceptions, through grace, of the Father as the Creator, of the Son as the true Light, and of the Holy Spirit as the source of all morality. The same perceptions, however, although not perhaps as intense, can be the object of experience for any "baptised" person raised to a new supernatural and Trinitarian life by the character, that is, the imprint of the Word of God on our souls.

There is no doubt that the experience of grace of 1813 - "*there is no other wisdom but in God*" – was the immediate cause of Antonio's vocation to the priesthood. He revealed his intention to his parents in 1814 and, as he had feared, it was received with dismay and firm opposition. They had planned to place the future of their aristocratic position and wealth on his most capable shoulders and had dreamt for him an extremely successful career in the world; the idea of the son

of their dreams becoming a simple, insignificant priest hurt gravely both their pride and their expectations.

Antonio remained firm and clear; for him there was no better way of living one's life but to dedicate it entirely to serving God and neighbour. This is what he wrote to a friend in 1814, *"I have decided to become a priest and to use all that I have to get for myself a treasure in heaven. The little knowledge I hope to have with God's help I plan to use it in teaching others and do good to them"*; and to his teacher Pietro Orsi, in 1815, *"We, who die so soon after being born, can do little and therefore must choose the best. How I would like to be of help to my brothers and sisters! Dear Don Pietro, pray the good God for me, because without Him we can do nothing"*.

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.

We have a number of letters written to his father giving information about his progress: *"I have had no time yet to visit the most precious places of art in Padua; I have visited, however, more than once the libraries of the Seminary and of the Bishop: what an immense collection of books! I must confess that I must keep a tight control over myself not to spend all I have in books, since it seems to me that gold is nothing in comparison with such treasures of wisdom"*; and again, *"For food, we prepare it*

ourselves – the main dish being always the queen of all food, “Lady Polenta””.

In a letter of 1819, he describes to his father a typical day: *“I get up at about 6am, and after prayer I study until 8am. After breakfast I attend lessons until midday. I attend Mass in the Basilica, and then back home I study until 2pm, when I have something to eat. After lunch, I occupy myself in conversations or in some other useful activity until 4.30. I then continue my study until 7.30pm, from which time until 9pm I enjoy myself in conversations with lecturers or with my excellent friends. At 9pm the five of us are all at home, where we gather in a room for common spiritual reading, meditation, and Rosary. After which we have our dinner, and after a few more moments of conversation we retire to our rooms, where, after prayer, I finally go to bed and sleep soundly till morning”*.

The conversations with his *“excellent friends”* centred especially on new projects aimed at defending the Catholic doctrine, or the purity of the Italian language, or the setting up of printing facilities for the translation of the Bible in many languages, and of other classical works. The most valued and

urgent project, however, was the setting up of the *“Society of Friends”*, that envisaged a group of “friends” – priests and others – living together in a “common house” and working tirelessly in defence of Catholic teaching by means of powerful, solid, and persuasive books and articles collected into what was meant to be the Catholic answer to the French Encyclopaedia of Diderot and D’Alembert, well known for its anti-religion, anti-God, anti-Church attacks.

The young Rosmini was eaten up by sorrow in seeing the immense damage done to humanity and to the Catholic Church by the muddled writings of the French Encyclopaedia that had become so popular and appealing by giving easy, superficial, and mistaken solutions to the fundamental problems of mankind. He felt desperately the need to show the falsity of such views by means of strict reasoning and of sound philosophical and theological principles. The Society of Friends was seen by him as the means for undertaking such restoration of the sciences in defence of the “catholic religion”.

The implementation of the project demanded a huge amount of time, energy, research, and

Antonio and two of his closest friends embraced the new adventure with great enthusiasm. Their efforts continued for a few years, then, soon after the ordination to the priesthood, the whole project came to a sudden end. We shall see the reasons later.

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, progressively, 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*". And Fr. Villoresi, "*I have seen how the Saints celebrate the divine Sacrifice. I was persuaded that Fr. Rosmini was no less a Saint than the greatest philosopher*". His custom was to say Mass by himself or with one or two of his guests, since it

was a rather lengthy period, full of the outpouring of his soul. He prepared faithfully, celebration took about one hour, followed by thanksgiving. It was also customary for him, whenever he could, to read the Bible in an orderly fashion, kneeling, for about one hour after Mass. He thus confided to his secretary Fr. Paoli in 1851 to have read the entire Bible seven times by this method.



A black and white portrait of a young man with dark, wavy hair, looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. He is wearing a dark, high-collared coat. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

CHAPTER 3

THE PRINCIPLE OF “PASSIVITY”

*“By ourselves we are incapable of
doing anything good”*

THE PRINCIPLE OF “PASSIVITY”

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 the 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?

In 1813, divine grace caused Rosmini to experience in a lively way that “*there is no wisdom but in God*”; in 1815, that there is a “*system of truth*” based on the one idea of being, the mother of all other ideas, a system, therefore, that has the essential qualities of unity and totality; in 1821, finally, that the “*great business*” in one’s life is to attend to the purification of one’s soul, waiting for God to manifest His Will concerning eventual works of charity.

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 studies and in prayer. 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 the good God had allowed the failure of all his projects to teach him to wait for Him “*in silence and hope*”.

This is what he wrote in his diary in 1821:

“1821 - ... It had been a while since I had put into practice, without a formal resolution, the principle of “passivity”, driven by profound awareness of my absolute impotence and so taught by experience. For, every

time I had previously started a new project, the “Society of Friends” for example, it had never been brought to a successful conclusion. God allowed this to happen so that I may open my eyes and, putting aside my natural pride, I would acknowledge my impotence. The more I meditated on my principle of “passivity” the more I recognised how right and necessary it was”.

This exceptional moment of grace that became the foundation of his spirituality and of his special charism as Founder of the Institute of Charity and of the Sisters of Providence, was given a more formal expression in a document written in 1830, in which the one principle of passivity is described in the two moments separately:

“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;

“Not to refuse any duties of charity towards my neighbour when divine Providence offers

and presents them to me, for God can use anyone, even me, to accomplish his work, and to remain completely open to all works of charity, doing what God offers me – as far as my free will is concerned – with as much devotion as any other work”.

The one original “*principle of passivity*” has thus been explained further by drawing from it a second principle, the “*principle of indifference*”.

The initial choice, therefore, is always to dedicate oneself to the purification of conscience and the acquisition of virtues, in the quiet and peace of the contemplative life; but while engaged in this first, essential work, the soul is all the time listening to the voice of God, prepared to embrace with all the energy one can muster “*any*” work of charity the Lord may demand.

The soul, therefore, does not choose, must be “*indifferent*” to any work whatsoever the Lord wants it to do. Only thus the soul can truly say, “*May your Will be done*”, or “*My food is to do the Will of my Father in heaven*”, or “*I have not come to do my will, but the Will of my Father in heaven*”.

A black and white portrait of a man, likely a religious figure, shown in profile from the chest up. He is looking down and to the left, at a document he is holding. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting his face and the texture of his hair and clothing. The background is dark and indistinct.

CHAPTER 4

THE FOUNDING OF THE INSTITUTE OF CHARITY

*“The Constitutions are not my work: the plan
and nature of the Institute was given to me ”*

Writing to his friend G Brunati in 1827, Rosmini manifested to him his desire to enter the religious life, awaiting a more definite call from the Lord:

“Your news [to become a Jesuit] prompts me to tell you my own secret. I too have decided to abandon this world and enter religious life. I know you will ask immediately if I intend becoming a Jesuit. No but not through lack of love of Christ’s Praetorian Guard, if I may put it that way. God has called me elsewhere, and you know how carefully we must listen for his voice and how faithfully we must follow it. I am called elsewhere, as I said, but definitely to the religious life... Like you, I don’t know when the Lord will bring this about. Let us pray, then, without ceasing. Everything has to come from him alone”.

A few years earlier, 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 had been 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)

“I have written to the Marchesa Maddalena di Canossa and sketched the first draft of the Society of Charity which has as its foundation the principle of passivity in all undertakings”
(Diary of Charity)

Later in life Rosmini recalled the solemnity of that spiritual enlightenment, when he confided to one of his brethren, *“The Constitutions of the Institute of Charity are not my work: the plan and nature of the Institute was given to me”*.

After the profound spiritual experience, Rosmini immersed himself in extensive research on religious life, from 1825 to 1827. He read all that had been written and took the abundant notes which make up the three volumes of his work entitled *“Directorium Spiritus”*.

There we find St. Basil, St. Benedict, St. Anthony of the Desert, St. Dominic, St. Francis, St. Augustine, St. Jerome, St. Athanasius, St. Cassian, St. Bernard, St. Cyprian, St. John Chrysostom, St. Gregory Nazianzen, St. Ignatius, St. Bonaventure, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Alphonsus de Liguori, St. Francis de Sales, St. Ambrose, St. Teresa, St. Bridget, and many others.

He also took notes from the various Councils of the Church, from a number of “history books” of religious Orders, and from other spiritual writings and Constitutions. The *Directorium Spiritus* affords us a glimpse into the amazing scientific manner of his investigations, and his desire to use the great spiritual, philosophical, theological patrimony of humanity as far as possible.

Rosmini prepared himself for the great task, but he still waited patiently for the Lord to reveal to him the time and the way. And it happened in a most unexpected and apparently fortuitous manner, in Milan.

During the years at Rovereto after his ordination (1821-1825) Rosmini had published or had prepared for publication a number of books: On Christian Education (1820), History of Love (published in 1834), Essay on Happiness (1822), Examinations of the views of M Gioia (1824), Panegyric of Pius VII (published in 1831), On Divine Providence (1826), On the Unity of Education (1826).

In 1823 he had the opportunity of going to Rome, having been asked by the Patriarch of Venice Ladislao Pyrker to accompany him. The bishops of Trentino and Veneto often spoke only German, having been appointed by the Austrian Emperor from places outside Italy; a few of them often appreciated and asked for Rosmini's help in learning Italian or in having their pastoral letters checked and corrected by him. He thus established good relations with a number of them, including Bishops Grasser, Pyrker, Luschin, and others.

His journey to Rome with the Patriarch was extremely useful. He was received by Pope Pius VII who encouraged him to write books on philosophy; he also became acquainted with other influential people, like Cardinal Castiglioni (the future Pius VIII), and the abbot Mauro Cappellari (the future Gregory XVI).

The new friends put pressure on him to stay in Rome: his aristocratic background, his fine intelligence, his piety, and his natural inclination to friendship, constituted a guarantee of a speedy career in ecclesiastical circles. But Rosmini was not tempted and returned to his studies at Rovereto.

There are a few questions in the life of Rosmini to which it is difficult to provide an answer, for example, why did he choose to write his doctoral thesis on the unusual topic, "*De Sybillis lucubratiuncula*"?⁴ And why did he dedicate himself with huge efforts in the "severe study" of Politics from 1822 to 1827, so soon after his ordination and before writing his main philosophical works?

The traditional answer to the first question is that a friend or a lecturer put some pressure on him; the answer to the second question is more complex: it was, perhaps, to formulate just, Christian ways of dealing with the political aspirations of nations after the French revolution that has sown unrest in nearly every other nation in Europe, or to indicate the profound errors of civil constitutions modelled after the French constitution, presenting at the same time rational solutions to the serious problems affecting society.

It is difficult to know for certain, but the fact is that Rosmini felt that God had called him to investigate from a philosophical perspective the political problems, to help troubled and restless nations. But he found

⁴ see page 153

the work extremely tiring and burdensome, although – as expected from his inquisitive mind – very interesting.

To pursue these studies by availing himself of more substantial material for consultation, and also, possibly, to take a rest from the awkward behaviour of his brother Giuseppe, in 1826 Rosmini took the decision to move to Milan, where he arrived in February with his secretary Maurizio Moschini, his domestic Antonio Bisoffi, and his dear friend Niccolo' Tommaseo.

He remained in Milan for two years, concentrating on Politics but without neglecting the many other philosophical and spiritual interests. He completed his work on Politics in 1827, with the title “*On the natural Constitution of civil Society*”, but was dissuaded by his friends Manzoni and Tommaseo from publishing it. The times were dangerous, and they feared for Rosmini’s safety.

Two events stand out from his time in Milan. The first is the meeting with the greatest Italian writer of the 19th century, Alessandro Manzoni, facilitated by their common friend Tommaseo. The two great minds were one on fundamental

Christian values, on their love for Italy, on their cultural and artistic interests. They acquired a tremendous veneration for each other, and spent hours in debating philosophical, moral, political, literary issues, and the most urgent events of the day. Their friendship grew year after year, and it was to Manzoni that Rosmini left on his death-bed his spiritual testament, “*Adore, Be Silent, Rejoice*”.

The other providential event was what finally set in motion the founding of the Institute of Charity. This is how Rosmini described the events 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.

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.

He wrote immediately to Fr. Loewenbruck: *“Come, hurry: I have a great desire to embrace*

you. We shall spend Lent in the desert, like the one our Divine Master made for us all”; and a few days later, *“My dear friend and brother, why are you not coming? Why the delay? Were you not the cause of my setting into motion the work that I had in mind for so long, warming up with your zeal my coldness?”* and to the bishop of Novara, *“I have with me my secretary and my domestic, whom I shall send back later on. My intention is to spend Lent in this holy solitude, to purify my soul with God’s help and to discern His Will, so as to fulfil it”*.

He wrote also to St. Magdalene of Canossa, with her prophetic words in his mind, *“I wish the Sons of Charity to be born between Jesus on the cross and His sorrowful Mother”*: the Church of Sacro Monte Calvario was dominated by the sculptures of Christ on the cross and of His sorrowful Mother.

His friends in Milan were all in turmoil, they could not understand what Rosmini was doing in the rough solitude of Sacro Monte Calvario. Only a few months earlier Rosmini had fallen seriously ill and he himself had been preparing for death since his doctor had told him that his illness was terminal. And

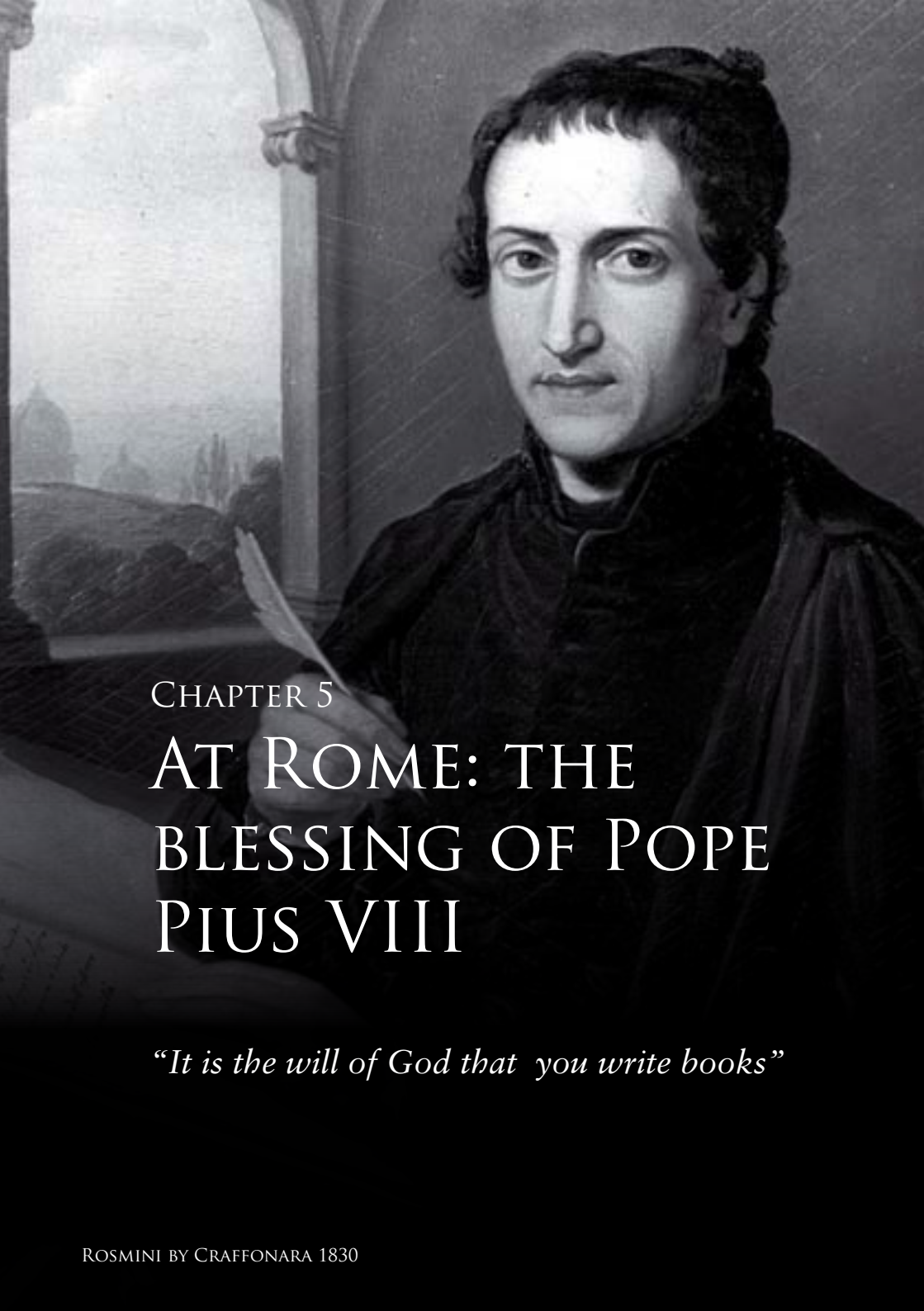
now, still in bad health, he was up on a mountainous region in the middle of a severe winter, with little food and in solitude!

Rosmini reassured them, the little food – polenta and milk – was not causing him any distress, and the rough conditions did not bother him; on the contrary, his heart was so full of joy that at times it seemed to him to be experiencing the awe and wonder of the innocent Adam in the Garden of Eden! To Tommaseo, who thought Rosmini had gone out of his mind in abandoning his studies and the joys of friendship, he explained, “*We must build the foundation first and then the edifice, charity first and then science*”.

It was clear that Rosmini was carefully discerning the Will of God for himself: he was certain that God wanted him to engage in philosophical studies and to write in defence of the Catholic faith for the benefit of his brothers and sisters; he was also certain that God wanted him to pursue holiness in a congregation of brothers and priests on the basis of the special charism the Lord had given him, the principle of passivity.

Priority, so far, had been given to personal purification and to study and research; the time had come now to “finely tune” the two missions, the eternal first then the temporary, charity first then science. It meant, practically, that the foundation of the Institute – the means of great charity in the Church – was to be given priority, it was to be set up resolutely, always in humble discernment of God’s Will.

Fr. Loewenbruck joined Rosmini at Calvario on 8th July, and immersed himself immediately into the work of improving living conditions and of displaying his immense apostolic zeal among the people of the local valleys. On the 22nd July Rosmini had to leave Calvario since his permit to reside outside Austrian territories was about to expire. He left Fr. Loewenbruck at Calvario and made his way to Rovereto. Soon after, three new vocations joined Fr. Loewenbruck at Calvario, and Rosmini followed closely by means of letters the first religious community of the newly born Institute of Charity.



CHAPTER 5

AT ROME: THE BLESSING OF POPE PIUS VIII

“It is the will of God that you write books”

Rosmini went to Rome to put before the Pope the mission he felt he had from God, and to receive confirmation from him. He did not manage to meet Pope Leo XII, who died on 10th February 1829. Rosmini wrote to his little flock at Calvario, *“Today the Holy Father has died. He was very fond of me”*. The newly elected Pope was Cardinal Castiglione who took the name of Pius VIII; Rosmini had met him a few years earlier, and, through the great friendship with Cardinal Cappellari, it was the new Pope who invited Rosmini to see him.

The meeting with Pius VIII was a great event in the life of Rosmini. The words spoken by the Pope manifested in the clearest way the Will of God for him for the rest of his life. He had doubts no longer, and he dedicated himself with all his passion and strength to fulfil his mission. It was as though God Almighty Himself had spoken directly to him. This is what he wrote, years later, about that meeting:

“I still remember his loving and authoritative words: “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”.

(Introduction To Philosophy, 1850)

After speaking these words, the Pope pointed to a book he had on his desk entitled *“Galateo dei letterati”* and asked Rosmini if he knew who had written it (it had been published without the name of the author). Rosmini blushed, and the Pope congratulated him for its clear doctrine and ideas. Rosmini changed topic by asking the Pope’s blessing on the Institute of Charity. The Pope said, *“Start in a simple way and let the Lord do the work. It is necessary to start with humility and prudence. You are on the right track, continue what you are doing”*.

Rosmini left the Pope with his heart full of joy: his mission was to save souls through the Institute of Charity and to enlighten minds through his writings; holiness and science, faith and reason, religion and philosophy bound up together at the service of the Church and of God. He communicated the good news

immediately to Fr. Loewenbruck at Calvario:

*“I found the Pope most gracious and most generous. After kissing his foot, he spoke to me of the books I had presented to him, showing that he had read them and knew them well. He insisted that I should continue to write, with words so kind that I am ashamed even to write them. After which he spoke about our common interest about which he had heard already many good things, especially from Cardinal Morozzo. He spoke to me these words which I transcribe so as to be the norm of our future conduct: **“If you intend to begin in a small way, leaving the Lord to do the rest, we give our approval and are very happy for you to continue”**. I wrote precisely what I heard so that we may be reassured that we are on the right track and that the work is the Will of God”*.

Rosmini communicated the good news to his friend and tutor, Don Pietro Orsi:

*“The Pope expressed his will that I should write, saying openly that this is the will of God for me: **“Your mission is to write books and not to pursue the duties of the active life. You can handle logic very well and we do need writers who are capable of being feared”***.

Rosmini remained at Rome for another year. Rome for him was the Holy City, the centre on earth of the Kingdom of God. It seemed most appropriate that he should publish in Rome the two foundational works of his spirituality and philosophy, the *“Maxims of Christian Perfection”*, and the *“New Essay Concerning the Origin of Ideas”*. Cardinal Cappellari urged him to do so and asked for a shortened version of the Constitutions for presentation to the Holy See. It was from Rome, therefore, from the heart of the Church, in full communion with the Vicar of Christ, that Rosmini launched his spiritual and cultural message.

Completed his successful permanence in Rome Rosmini travelled to Sacro Monte Calvario, Domodossola in May 1830, to start with his small community a proper novitiate on the basis of the Constitutions of the Institute. He participated fully in all activities prescribed by the Rules, even in the most menial ones, like sweeping the floor, helping in the kitchen, digging in the garden. It is said that the exasperated cook more than once told him, *“Please Don Antonio, do write books but do not come near the kitchen!”* He wrote, during this time, his third foundational work, *“Principles of Ethics”*.

A black and white portrait of a man, likely Rosmini, wearing a dark, high-collared coat with a bow at the neck. He is looking slightly to the right. The background is a plain, light color.

CHAPTER 6

EXPANSION AND
FORMAL APPROVAL
OF THE INSTITUTE
OF CHARITY

“Jesus is the Lord of the Church”

The years 1831-1839 were very busy for Rosmini, engaged full time in his double mission of building up a solid Catholic philosophy to serve as a worthy basis for theology, and of looking after the consolidation and expansion of the Institute of Charity. In 1831 he was at Trento to negotiate the opening of a religious house at the request of the bishop. Rosmini was well aware of the pitiful conditions of bishops in the Austrian Empire, appointed by their Emperor and considered his ministers rather than free Princes of the Church. Without permission from the Emperor they had no power to travel outside the Empire, not even to go to Rome. Their hands were bound by a thick web of imperial regulations.

During the negotiations, Rosmini had a first hand experience of the servitude of the Church: permission for a house in Trento had to be granted directly by the Emperor, but only after he had seen and approved on a trial basis the Constitutions of the Institute. Rosmini had to agree to a number of severe restrictions hoping to persuade the bishop otherwise in the future. The house at Trento was opened in 1831, followed by a house in Verona in 1833.

In 1834, at the death of the parish priest, Rosmini was asked by the bishop, as a result of popular demand from his own compatriots, to take charge of the parish at Rovereto. He found the decision the most harrowing of his life so far: how could he possibly be a good parish priest with his commitment as Superior of the Institute of Charity and of the Sisters of Providence, his special vocation to write and publish books, his energies limited by continuous bouts of very bad health? He wrote to the bishop explaining his objections but expressing his willingness to obey if the bishop felt that God wanted of him this huge sacrifice.

Rosmini was parish priest at Rovereto for the short period of one year, during which he displayed immense pastoral zeal, in direct contact with his parishioners, visiting them often, helping the poorer families, visiting and caring for the prisoners, organising religious instructions for men, women, and children, and helping with the religious education of children in schools.

Such flurry of activities, and especially the highly successful religious instruction meetings in the evening – which angered some

of the local wine sellers for loss of business - soon came to the notice of the Austrian authorities who began a campaign of harassment and prohibitions. Austria feared Rosmini since his views as a patriot and supporter of Italian unity were well known to them. General Radetzky had called Rosmini "*a man of dangerous principles*", for his political views about Italian unity, but especially for his constant appeals of freedom for the Church.

It was during the time of the negotiations with the Austrian authorities and the local bishops, 1832-1833, that Rosmini wrote his most controversial book, "*The Five Wounds of Holy Church*", which he did not publish immediately, for "*the time did not seem ripe*". He wrote in the Introduction, "*I wrote this book in a villa near Padua, as a release from the intense sorrow of my heart, and a comfort perhaps to others as well*".

The Church was the object of his thoughts and preoccupations, and he denounced with passion the source of all her troubles, the subservience of bishops to their monarchs and the corresponding loss of freedom for the Church. It is true that Emperors and Kings

had often granted protection and wealth, honours and social status, but at what price! It had changed bishops from shepherd and fathers of their flock to civil princes and distant and wealthy ministers of their rulers; it had caused a profound division among the bishops, and with the priests who had been abandoned to themselves, often without sufficient education and discipline, which in turn caused a profound ignorance among the faithful of the doctrines and of the meaning of the liturgy of the Church.

Writing to Tommaseo at about the same time, Rosmini had lamented, "*When the Church is loaded with the wealth of Egypt as her prize, when she seems to be the arbiter of nations, only then she is impotent, she is the young David oppressed by Saul's armour, she has begun the time of her decadence*".

During the first six centuries, the Church was poor but was free; and that was precisely the time of her most amazing faith, spiritual power, and profound love: a shining sign of the kingdom of God among men.

Forced to give up the pastoral care of souls at Rovereto and

to close the very promising house at Trento, because of the harassment of the Austrian authorities, Rosmini returned to Domodossola to direct more closely the rapid expansion of the Institute.

When in Rome – 1829-1830 – Rosmini had made the acquaintance with a bright and talented young man, fresh from a severe disappointment. Luigi Gentili had fallen in love with a young English woman, only to be rejected when he had finally proposed to her. The subsequent personal crisis had caused him to consider entering the religious life with the Jesuits, but he had suffered from violent fever every time he had tried to go to their house in Rome.

He spoke to Rosmini, and entrusted himself to his spiritual direction. After a period of discernment, he asked to become a member of the Institute and was sent to Calvario for his novitiate, where after only two months, he was appointed novice master, guiding his own companions to the perfection of the religious life. Rosmini had recognised in him the potential to become a great saint, and guided him with love, but demanding of him more than of others.

It was to Gentili that Rosmini commissioned the daring initiative of opening a mission in England, at the invitation of Bishop Baines. Although still few in numbers and with demands to undertake works of charity from many parts of Italy, Rosmini opened up his Institute to England by sending in 1835 three Italian priests to teach, initially, in the seminary at Prior Park, near Bath.

Soon Gentili distinguished himself for the power of his preaching and for his missionary zeal, and re-introduced in England many of the Catholic customs that had disappeared since the times of the Reformation. He was close to the people, who came in their hundreds to listen to his fiery sermons, baptising and receiving many into the Church, and spending long hours in the confessional. He knew and was very close to Lockhart and Newman, and received Lockhart into the Catholic Church and later into the Institute of Charity.

Rosmini followed the work with great interest and love, recommending him and the others to “*adopt the English way of life little by little in all that was not sinful*”. He entertained the idea of founding a College for Missionaries in England, with

the intention of preparing men for mission work in India, at that time an English colony. His death prevented this idea from reaching fruition. We may add that it was Gentili who brought the Institute of Charity to Ireland in 1847.

The rapid expansion of the Institute demanded its urgent formal approval from the Holy See. Rosmini had written shortened versions of the Constitutions for approval by the bishops who had Rosminian Houses in their diocese, and for the approval of other bishops and cardinals. The replies from them had always been positive and even enthusiastic.

A strong supporter had been, from the beginning, Cardinal Cappellari who had assured Rosmini he would show the Constitutions to some cardinals at the time of the Conclave that had elected Pius VIII. This same cardinal Cappellari had now succeeded Pius VIII with the name of Gregory XVI. What better omen?

In 1837, Rosmini asked Cardinal Castracane, a very close friend, to present officially the Constitutions for the approval of the Holy See. For this purpose he sent to Rome Fr. Setti with the precise instruction to stay

with the Jesuits and to take guidance from them in all things. Rosmini had developed a great love for St. Ignatius, the founder of the Jesuits, since his youth; he had meditated at length on his Spiritual Exercises, recommending them in his writings and to his brethren. He had read carefully the Constitutions of St. Ignatius and had incorporated much material into his own Constitutions, especially matters related to organisation and governance.

Rosmini had felt very close to the Jesuits, defined by him "*the Praetorian Guard of Christ*": but he was now in for a great shock! The battle over the Constitutions will mark the beginning of protracted hostility from some of them not only towards his writings and his person, but also towards his Institute of Charity.

The first difficulties came to the fore when the Jesuit Fr. Zecchinelli was asked to give his opinion on the Constitutions. He produced a long list of negative comments. Rosmini received a copy from Fr. Setti and remarked, "*I am very unhappy that Fr. Zecchinelli has raised objections on matters which he clearly did not understand.*"

All his objections are without foundation. I would suggest to Cardinal Castracane not to ask the opinion of the Jesuits, since on this matter they seem to me incapable of taking an objective view. I leave everything into the hands of Providence". Cardinal Castracane himself was convinced that the cause of the objections was pure jealousy, but it had to be tackled.

A similar list of negative comments was given by the servite Fr. Secchi Murro who found the terminology inaccurate and perhaps demanding theological censure. In particular, strong objections were raised about the ideas of "voluntary" obedience, and of a new concept of poverty which allowed the individual religious to possess goods before the law whilst totally subject to obedience and to total inward detachment by means of the vow.

Rosmini explained patiently, but with little success. The constant and unreasonable opposition of the Jesuit member of the panel saddened him greatly, "I never expected to find hostility where I was sure to find brotherhood". It was as a result of deep frustration that he decided finally to write to the Pope, "My hopes are pinned on you alone, since you

enjoy that divine assistance that will never lack to the Church of Jesus". The Pope reassured him, and on 20th December 1838, after nearly two years of unprecedented cross examination, the Roman Congregation, made up of eight Cardinals, met and approved formally the Institute of Charity, granting all privileges proper to Religious Orders and in particular the exemption from Episcopal jurisdiction.

Rosmini received the great news 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". He asked for prayers of thanksgiving and then issued the date for the first perpetual profession of the members of the newly approved Institute, the feast of the Annunciation on 25th March 1839: "We shall offer ourselves to God with perpetual vows, a thought which fills the heart of every lover of our Institute and of the cross of Jesus Christ with immense joy".

And joy is the mark of every letter written by Rosmini during the period from Christmas day until 25th March 1839. Writing to Count Mellerio on 28th January he asks for prayers for the

great day, *“Double for us your prayers, as we prepare for the great feast of the Annunciation. What a great day it will be! A truly memorable day for our Institute! I am selecting among the brethren about thirty to make their perpetual profession on that day, which will be done at the same time at Calvario and at Prior Park. Imagine what a spiritual riot that event will be for us”*.

The great day came. At Calvario of Domodossola, in the Church dedicated to Jesus on the Cross, the first group of religious of the Institute of Charity, gathered around their founder, made their religious profession. Rosmini preached a moving sermon, *“The Word of the Lord called us from different places and countries, He bound us together with glorious love, and whereas before we were unknown to each other, now we have become one thing in Jesus Christ”*. The sermon dealt with the first link – justice – of the golden chain that binds together the religious among themselves and with God. The other links, preached over the next few years at the religious profession of brethren, were: Providence, Love, Sacrifice, and Glory.

On this day of great spiritual joy, Rosmini wrote two letters,

the first to the Holy Father Pope Gregory XVI, the second to Cardinal Castracane, expressing his gratitude and joy.

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:

“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”.



CHAPTER 7

FIRST
CONTROVERSY
1840-1843

*“We must love the Church and be ready to
shed our blood for Her”*

The Epistemology of the New Essay had been saluted in Italy and abroad as a revelation, the work of a genius: “A learned and profound work... Great work, sublime, and profound... It should become the textbook of Colleges... The author is worth of Aristotle, and leaves behind all the great philosophers...” In effect, it is difficult to find a more comprehensive and persuasive explanation of the origin of all ideas, and a more substantial proof of the existence of truth and of its closeness to the human mind.

Soon after his work on epistemology, the foundation of philosophy, there followed the work on Ethics, and then on the subject of ethics, man. The “*Anthropology as an Aid to Moral Science*” is the work that, starting from the definition of man, describes him in his essential animal and intellectual components joined in the one human soul. The human will, as the supreme principle of activity, is the seat and centre of personhood.

In the years 1837-1839 Rosmini published other works on morality, “*A Comparative History and Critique of the systems that deal with the principle of Morality*” and “*A*

Treatise on Moral Conscience”. This last book became the cause of a fierce attack on Rosmini that took everyone by surprise for the sordid manners, the vile accusations, the direct personal insults to Rosmini, and the anonymity of the attackers. For Rosmini, a man of simple and pure innocence, passionate about the truth but always polite, respectful, humble this first dark controversy was a new painful experience which he saw as permitted by the Lord to purify him and to bring about His divine, mysterious plans for the good of the Church.

There had been a number of controversies about various issues on the philosophical front, and this was seen by Rosmini the normal way of conducting philosophical debates. There had been a lively debate with Gioberti, a philosopher and a patriot, over what is precisely that the mind “intuits”, real or ideal being. Another exchange was had with Mamiani, but although philosophical passion caused sometimes heated attacks, these did not surprise Rosmini in the least. Once in the philosophical arena, one has to expect harsh exchanges in defence of the truth.

But the attacks on the Treatise

on Conscience were different. Anonymous articles began to appear lamenting Rosmini's treatment of St. Alphonsus' reputed views on "probabilism", adding, however, religious and theological accusations, and labelling him a "heretic" of the worst kind. Soon a libel book began to be circulated anonymously entitled, "*On some affirmations of Antonio Rosmini priest from Rovereto, with reflections written by Eusebio Cristiano*".

The book, which had no date, no author, no place of issue was being distributed freely to bishops, professors of Seminaries, and people of culture. Copies of the book were being passed from hand to hand secretly, with vile personal attacks on Rosmini, declared a follower of Calvin, Luther, Bajo, Quesnel, and other heretics. He was called a "*terrible liar, a blind writer, a cunning deceiver of people*". An insistent rumour was spread widely in Rome and in many other towns that the Church would soon condemn not only the Treatise but all of Rosmini's works.

Rosmini, initially, did not pay much attention to the rumours; but soon a number of bishops, priests, professors, friends from

many parts of Italy wrote very worried letters reporting the same accusations and tactics.

Rosmini wrote to his friend Count Mellerio, "*I must tell you in confidence some news that causes me great sorrow, not so much on my account but on account of the authors of such evil. I have been told of a secret conspiracy: enemies are spreading in great secret in many towns of Italy in the ears of distinguished persons, who immediately become alarmed, that I am a convicted heretic, a jansenist, and worse. They hand out in secret a booklet against me, which I have had no way of seeing yet. I shudder to think who the authors of such conspiracy are, but I can have no doubt, since the information has come to me from two Cardinals and a Bishop: they are the same ones who put up such fierce resistance against the approval of the Institute of Charity. Please pray the Lord for me. The proximity of the battle makes me trust in the Lord even more*".

And writing to Cardinal Castracane, he says, "*A few days ago, a gentleman came from Rome and told me that there is a conspiracy against me. I told him that Rome is not a place for conspiracies, but he insisted,*

“Your opponents are scheming in the most subtle way to ruin you completely”. I humbly ask your Eminence to keep me informed about what is going on, for I know that slanderous accusations can indeed cause great damage to one’s reputation”.

When Rosmini managed, through friends, to get hold of the book, known soon to have been written by the Jesuit Fr. Pio Melia, he published a firm reply entitled, *“An Answer to the false Eusebio Cristiano”*. It was clear to Rosmini that there was no real theological debate to be had since the objections were so vacuous and superficial, only a pretext for an attack on his person and on the Institute. He nonetheless rebutted every accusation with great force, but used the opportunity to shed more light on a number of points, so as not to waste his time.

He wrote to his friend Fr. Barola in Rome: *“I have been to Verona to preach the retreat to the clergy. Even there my opponents had circulated the libel book of Eusebio in their usual manner, passing it from hand to hand in secret and with evil words against me. My God! What kind*

of blindness is this? What manner of acting, so far from what their holy Founder would want! But I have written the reply and I am sure that many will then open their eyes”.

And to Count Mellerio he wrote, *“My opponents at Novara hand the booklet written against me to the young people of their College, portraying me as the “bau bau”: this is what some of the young people themselves told me”.*

Three were the principal reasons for Rosmini’s suffering and sadness during the time of this controversy:

1. The realisation that a small but influential current of opposition was mounting in the Church against his writings and against his works, the Institute of Charity and the Sisters of Providence;
2. The proof that such opposition was being orchestrated in a subtle and defamatory way by some members of the body that he had most respected and loved in the Church, the Jesuits;⁵
3. The stunning accusation that he, the most loyal son of the Church, was actually being presented

as a heretic, on a par with Calvin, Luther, and the others.

It was this last reason that caused him immense heartache and sorrow. His faith was being attacked, and questioned, that faith that had always given purpose and meaning to his life, his actions, his writings. There is no doubt that Rosmini would have given his life a hundred times for the Church; he would have found martyrdom for the Church an immense privilege, and he would have embraced torture and death joyfully and thankfully.

In a long letter to Fr. Bertoluzzi who had been shaken by the accusations of heresy against him, Rosmini opened up his heart:

“The most important thing is my faith, which they are attacking. I do not pretend to be infallible, my faith is based entirely on the authority of God, who communicates the truth through the Holy Church... I was not born to be learned or to gain glory from human beings, nor have I ever aimed at this in my poor labours. I was born to be a believer and made worthy of the promises of Christ, as a devout son of the Church... My treasure is the holy faith, and here my heart is to be found also. If it should happen, let us say, that the holy apostolic See, my teacher and the teacher of the whole world, were to find something

to correct in my works, I would have no difficulty in making any public declaration that would render my unshaken faith more clear.

Anything I could have said against this faith, I would certainly have maintained against my own feeling for things. Retracting what I had said would simply mean expressing the unchangeable thought I held in my heart, and correcting its external expression which would have failed to render exactly my intimate conviction – that is, my faith... All my trust is in God alone who infused me with faith as a baby and gave me an unlimited devotion to the decisions of the Holy See. He fills my heart with joy when I can make an act of faith, and would almost make me glad to have fallen into some involuntary error, without damaging others, in order to be able to confess my faith more deeply and solemnly...

The author of the libel, which is being circulated in secret, is possibly moved by zeal for the purity of the faith; it is also probable that he got himself very excited, and, being quite alien to strict philosophical doctrines and methods, has failed to understand what I was writing, and, having put together a few phrases taken here and there he came up with the opposite of what I was saying... But I suffer for the damage to others, and for seeing that the very people we should be working 43

with for the Kingdom are causing such division. But there is God, there is Christ: He knows His servants and He disposes all things for His glory and the good of His Church: why fear?"

Pope Gregory XVI followed the controversy with great sadness, convinced that it was a “question of jealousy” for the works of Rosmini. On the other hand, he did not wish to humiliate publicly a great Order like the Company of Jesus, that had already powerful enemies all over Europe, because of the deplorable actions of few of its members. In 1843 he intervened by imposing silence to both parties, Rosminians and Jesuits, hoping that the controversy would disappear.



A black and white portrait of a man, likely Rosmini, with a serious expression, wearing a dark, high-collared garment. The background is a soft, light gray.

CHAPTER 8

THE ROMAN
MISSION 1848-1849

*“Keep before your eyes the purple cloth that
was put on Jesus’ shoulders” (Gentili to
Rosmini)*

THE ROMAN MISSION 1848-1849

Pope Gregory XVI died in 1846, and the new Pope, Pius IX, became the symbol, for the population of the Italian states, of liberty and independence. He granted freedom to political prisoners, and wider liberties in the papal states, while building closer links with Piedmont and Tuscany. He was also considering whether to send his troops to fight against the Austrians side by side with the army of the king of Piedmont.

Rosmini anticipated with apprehension and hope the political events of those days. In March 1848, on hearing that the Pope had finally agreed to grant the constitutions to his States, Rosmini, fearing that it might be similar to the ones already granted in Naples, Tuscany, and Piedmont, in which he had identified serious errors, contacted at once Cardinal Castracane sending him his own project of constitution which he had time to prepare on the basis of severe studies during his stay at Milan in 1825-1827. When it arrived, it was too late: the Pope,

urged by the people, had already granted his constitution.

In the meanwhile the people of Milan had risen against the Austrians, who withdrew from the city. Rosmini went to Milan to show his support for the insurrection and to try to use his influence to curb excesses. He took advantage to publish "*The Constitution according to Social Justice*" – which he had written in 1827 – adding a small work with the title, "*Essay on the Unity of Italy*". He also published the book written in 1832-1833, "*The Five Wounds of Holy Church*".

After the initial support for the aspirations of the Italian populations, Pius IX had begun to waver. The insurrection in Milan and the frequent demands from the king of Piedmont to let the papal troops join in the war against the Austrians caused him anxiety and fear. Rosmini encouraged him, asking him to help the Italian cause: it was not a case of aggression against Catholic Austria, but an act of

justice, protecting Italians from oppression from a foreign power.

On more than one occasion Pius IX had asked for Rosmini's presence at Rome; he would have liked his views and his advice.

The opportunity came when the kingdom of Piedmont asked Rosmini to engage on a delicate, political mission to Rome on behalf of the king. The mission consisted in persuading the Pope to agree to a concordat between the Church and the kingdom of Piedmont, and to a confederation of Italian States under the overall leadership of the Pope.

This second initiative was particularly dear to Rosmini. He was certain that the forces pushing for the unification and freedom of Italy would one day succeed; he was also certain that Rome would become the capital of the new unified Italy. What would happen then to the prestige of the Holy See if it was seen to hinder rather than favour this process of unification? Would it not be pushed aside with contempt by the new Italian authorities and by the people?

He had written in these terms to the Pope, and he had suggested to him that the solution was to do all in his power to favour the process. In this way he would

have guaranteed respect and admiration for the Church. The confederation of Italian States under the supreme authority of the Pope seemed to Rosmini the only way forward.

The Pope welcomed Rosmini in Rome saying, "*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 a Cardinal in December. There were reliable rumours that on that occasion he would also be appointed Secretary of State. Rosmini's reaction was initially one of fear, then he calmly put himself in God's hands. He wrote to his presbyters asking for their opinion and permission. It was Fr. Gentili who wrote to him granting his permission but reminding his Father to "*keep before your eyes the purple cloth that was put on Jesus' shoulders mockingly during His passion*".

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. A new government in Piedmont had told Rosmini to forget the previous brief, concordat and confederation, and to press instead for obtaining a commitment from the Pope to send the papal troops to fight against the Austrians. Rosmini refused and resigned from the mission.

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”*.

The Pope had seen the book a few months earlier and had found nothing wrong with it, or at least so assumed Rosmini. On one occasion the Pope, under pressure from Antonelli, did say that one or two Cardinals had expressed some criticism but, added the Pope, *“they cannot see beyond their noses”*. Later, the Pope had sent Mons. Corboli to ask Rosmini to put down some explanations concerning five specific points: Rosmini obliged immediately with the help of the Monsignor himself. He had no further doubt that the Pope had been reassured by his explanations.

The harassment of the Neapolitan police became more persistent and threatening after the historical meeting with the Pope during which Rosmini heard with astonishment the Pope say, *“Dear Abate, we are no longer constitutional. The Constitution cannot be reconciled with the government of the Church, and freedom of press and of speech are intrinsically evil”*. Rosmini spoke frankly saying that the abolition of the constitution would be a mistake, and that the freedom of press should be regulated but not denied.

Days later, he was told by the police to leave the kingdom of Naples. On other similar occasions he had managed to stay on saying that he was there by the explicit order of the Pope and that the Pope, therefore, had to tell him to go. This time, knowing that the change in the Pope was irreversible, he decided to leave the kingdom of Naples and go to his friend Cardinal Tosti at Albano.

Writing to Fr. Pagani, he 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.

This is how Rosmini described the event to Fr. Pagani: *“I met the Pope on 9th June and also a few days later, that is, days after the signing of the Decree by him: he had treated me as usual, talking about the business of the State, and only during the last audience he said these words, “They are examining your works”, which I understood to mean “a private examination” of which I would be told the results. Instead there was no examination, since the Decree had already been signed”*. Rosmini continued by saying that he believed the Pope had not been free to act as he had wished, but that he had signed under pressures of all kinds.

He also wrote to Fr. Molinari: *“Sit nomen Domini benedictum, who has allowed the condemnation of my two works. The news came all of a sudden, because the whole thing had been kept secret. There was an extraordinary meeting of the Congregation at Naples, headed not by its secretary but by another who had been delegated, with the few Cardinals who happened to be in Naples, presided by Brignole, who has always been against our Institute, and as a consultor was used Secchi-Murro, who fought hard against the approval of the Constitutions of the Institute. There was no one in our favour.*

Let us thank God yet again: I have blindly submitted to the condemnation, although the reasons were kept secret, being more political than religious”.

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. Here are some examples:

“This unexpected event has not altered in any way my peace and tranquillity of spirit. Rather, I have been able to offer sincere feelings of gratitude and praise to divine Providence which disposes everything for love, and has permitted this for love alone. But this tranquillity is not something that can be called my own. I would be a prey to every kind of disturbance and passion if He who hears our humble prayers

and knows what we need in our weakness had not mercifully protected me with His grace, and put his own divine order in place of my disorder” (to Fr. Barola)

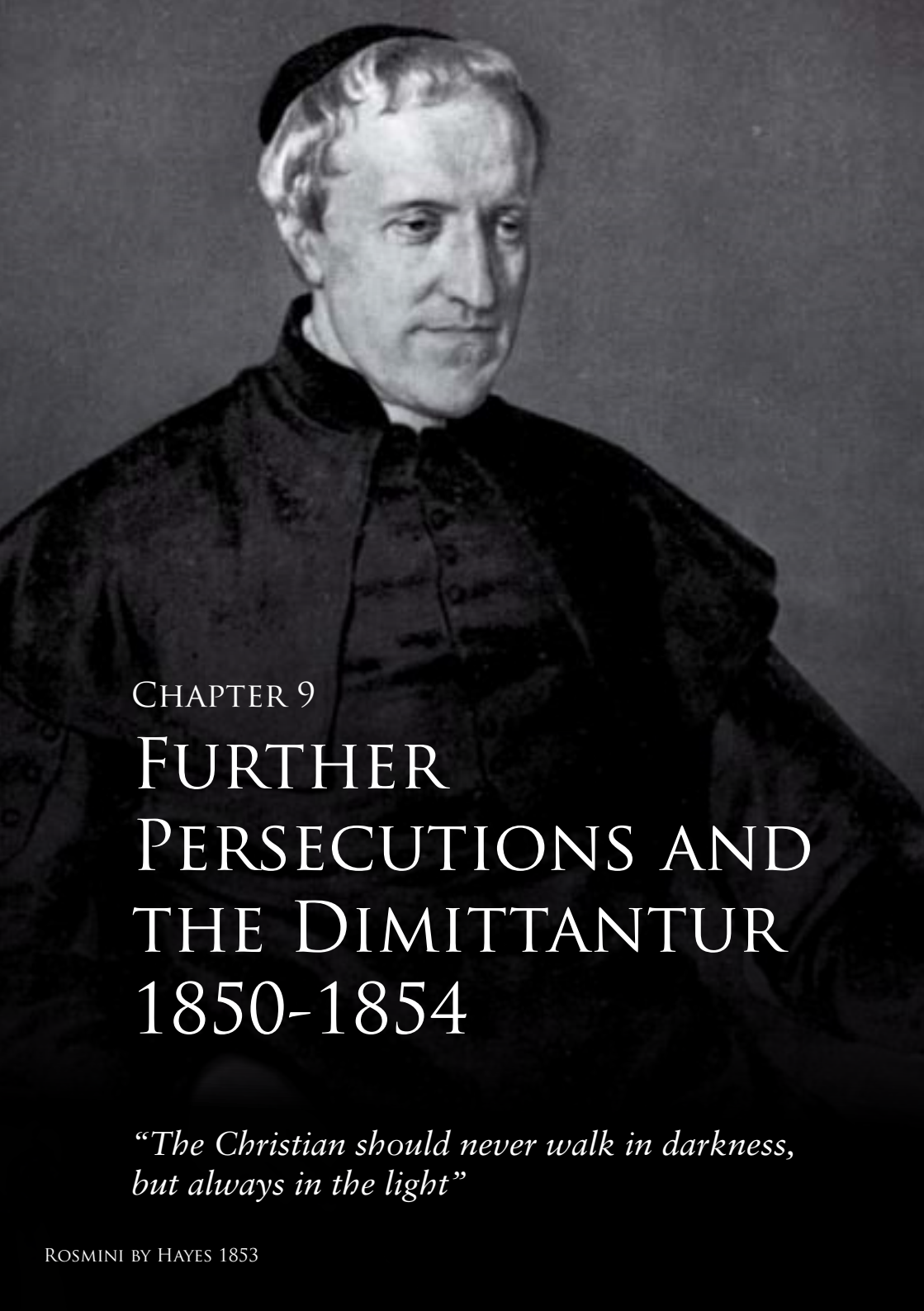
“Thank you for sharing in the strange and almost incredible events through which I am being led by Providence whose unchanging design never fails. Meditating on Providence, I wonder at it; wondering at it, I love it; loving it, I celebrate it; celebrating it, I thank it, and thanking it, I am filled with joy. Could it be otherwise? I know through reason and through faith, and feel in the depths of my spirit, that everything done, or wished or permitted by God, is done by eternal, infinite, essential Love. And who could be sad before love?” (to Fr. Parma)

It is also interesting to hear the impressions Manzoni’s daughter received at welcoming Rosmini to her house, on his way to Stresa. This is what she wrote in her diary:

“Full of commotion, we kissed the hand of the great Saint. The suffering and the disappointments of all kind had not taken anything away from the serene sweetness of his smile, which, together with his deep and penetrating eyes, gave his figure a super-human aspect. In effect, he mentioned next to nothing

of all that he had gone through. The topic was too delicate for the kind of priest he was, and no one dared to mention anything. He only said, commenting on a few words from my grandfather, “I thank God for the peace He has granted me”. He enjoyed the evening, playing with my little daughter Luisina, but he was extremely tired. In the morning he celebrated Mass in the small chapel at the house; my grandfather served Mass; Matilde and myself spent a heavenly hour”





CHAPTER 9

FURTHER
PERSECUTIONS AND
THE DIMITTANTUR
1850-1854

*“The Christian should never walk in darkness,
but always in the light”*

The start of the Roman mission had seen Rosmini at the apex of his reputation and status in this world, like Jesus on Palm Sunday; by the end, he was a defeated man, having failed in all the political objectives he had set for himself at the beginning. Moreover, some of his ideas about the Church had been condemned as dangerous to others. 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.

Particularly vicious was a book entitled “*Postille*” (“Notes”) containing 327 paragraphs of “heresies” allegedly taken from the writings of Rosmini. The book was distributed to bishops in Rome and elsewhere, asking them to put pressure on the Holy See to condemn Rosmini as a heretic, and all his works. A similar book, written by the Jesuit Fr. Ballerini, and entitled, “*Letters of a priest from Bologna*” was distributed with equal zeal and purpose.

The way the “*heresies*” were constructed was always the same: sentences were extrapolated from various parts of a book, and put together to make them say the “heresy” thought to have been detected. This unscrupulous and false method could be spotted easily by a learned and unbiased mind, and a number of bishops and friends of Rosmini took a strong stand against it, but it worked for all those who had never read Rosmini and who had little critical sense.

The letters of this period witness to Rosmini’ suffering for the vile manner, the invented heresies, and the dubious intentions of his attackers:

“The Jesuits are tearing me apart without mercy, and promise that in a very short time all my works will be condemned. Many of my enemies take advantage to damage not only my reputation, which I have given up to the Lord in sacrifice, but also more seriously the Institute and its many works of charity” (to Fr. Barola)

“It is truly sad to see the Civiltà Cattolica [a prestigious Jesuit magazine] go down so low as to invent what is not in my books, instead of showing love for the truth, which alone is the

foundation of civilisation and of the Catholic faith” (to Fr. Smith)

“There are other books against me in circulation that are passed from hand to hand in great secrecy. Two priests have just now published another book using the same tactics. And even in London, in the houses of Catholic nobility, my opponents are informing everyone of the great heresies professed by me and of the forth-coming prohibition of all my works” (to Benso di Cavour)

“My opponents have re-started the persecution against me of some years ago that had been put down by the authority of Gregory XVI by means of a severe command to stop the quarrels. They think the time has now come to oppress me with such violence, intensity, and acrimony like never before. I take my revenge by praying daily for them” (to G Fedrigotti)

In London, Cardinal Wiseman had called Fr. Pagani, the Rosminian Superior in England, to tell him that he was no longer favourable to the Rosminian Fathers, since their Founder had two of his books in the Index. He did not want them to preach anywhere in his diocese of Westminster, and said that he

would keep a vigilant eye on their work elsewhere in England. To the astonished Fr. Pagani who had asked why he had changed his mind so radically, Cardinal Wiseman said that he had heard that soon all of Rosmini's books would be condemned, that Rosmini himself would be asked by the Pope to step down as Superior General, and that the Institute itself would be changed drastically.

The Institute suffered considerably in Italy as well. Some bishops advised young men not to enter the Institute, and at times, tried to persuade one or the other of the Fathers to leave the Institute. The opposition to Rosmini of the Austrian bishop of Verona caused the end of a Rosminian house there.

But, in spite of the opposition and persecution, the Institute continued to expand. The Sisters of Providence, in particular, were blessed with many vocations and were very much in demand from local bishops. By the year 1872, at the death of their first Mother General, appointed by Rosmini in 1837, there were 500 Rosminian sisters, working in 50 different religious houses.

Pius IX had not changed his admiration and love for Rosmini.

From the exchange of letters between Rosmini and Cardinal Castracane in 1850-1851 we come to know that the Pope had not entirely given up on the idea of creating him a Cardinal, on condition that Rosmini would write a book retracting what he had written in *The Five Wounds*. To Rosmini's request to know what precisely the Pope would want him to retract there was no reply.

However, 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 *Postille* or the other books written by Fr. Ballerini; 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.

He sent to Rome Fr. Bertetti, with the task of answering questions from members of the commission and to provide clearer additions if required. 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*" (in Latin, "*Dimittantur opera omnia Antonii Rosmini*"). 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.

The Pope had hoped that the *Dimittantur* would put an end to the persecution of Rosmini, but it didn't. Required at the same time of the *Dimittantur* was a firm condemnation of the various libel books that had been written, as some members of the Commission had requested.

The Pope, instead, avoided taking measures against Rosmini's opponents. This was interpreted as a "lukewarm" support for Rosmini, and soon afterwards attacks against his writings began to appear, although in a much milder form.





CHAPTER 10

ROSMINI'S HOLY
DEATH AT STRESA,
1ST JULY 1855

“Adore, Be Silent, Rejoice”

ROSMINI'S HOLY DEATH AT STRESA, 1ST JULY 1855

During these years, Rosmini's double mission had continued with the usual intensity and whole-hearted commitment. By the end of his life he had written over 100 volumes of philosophy and theology, 13 volumes of letters, hundreds of articles, essays, spiritual works. Not for one moment, during the time of the painful controversies, did he doubt that God's Will for him was the restoration of Christian philosophy, and the setting of strong basis for theology. Not for a moment did he doubt that God had asked of him to found both the Institute of Charity and the Sisters of Providence.

His extraordinary mind had read with extreme care all the greatest authors of all times, from the classics of ancient Greece and Rome, to the great Christian writers, from the Fathers of the Church to the more modern theologians and philosophers. His early years had been an intense workshop of preparation. He had studied carefully the great philosophers of his time, Kant, Hegel, Fichte, Schelling,

Locke, Hume, Reid, and many others and had identified truths and serious errors in their views, errors which were not new since they tended to reappear periodically in human history.

The result of his profound studies and meditation was what he called "*the system of truth*", a Christian philosophy that had unshakeable rational foundations. Anyone who reads his books with an open mind experiences the power of the light that comes from them.

In a letter to Fr. Barola, Rosmini communicated to him his persuasion that his writings were full of the light of truth: "*I am convinced, and please do not consider this pride for God knows that I do not lie when I acknowledge myself most unworthy of His favour, yes, I am convinced that my doctrine comes from God, and that it is God alone who communicates it to me, not so much with human means but with the light of His grace*".

Rosmini returned to Stresa on 2nd November 1849. After one year he moved from the novitiate house on the hill to the “*Palazzo Bolongaro*”, a spacious mansion by the lake left to him by the holy woman countess Maria Bolongaro. His presence transformed the mansion into a “*house of piety, learning, science, and hospitality*”.

His days had the same routine: the sign of the Cross and the Credo kneeling by the bed first thing in the morning, one hour meditation, a long celebration of Mass, and the recitation of the breviary in the garden. Twice a day he met the community for the examination of conscience; in the evening they said the Rosary together, and read from the New Testament. The time in between was taken up by the writing of books, correspondence, and heated discussions with the many friends who came to visit or stayed with him.

In effect, Casa Bolongaro, became a place of pilgrimage for many: friends, religious, people from all walks of life came to him for advice. Famous ecclesiastical figures, Lacordaire, Wiseman, Newman, members of the nobility, university professors and lecturers of Seminaries, abbots, and priests, they all wanted to

hear a word from the learned philosopher and the saintly priest. When the time permitted, some of the closest friends, like Manzoni, Gustavo Cavour, and Bonghi engaged in long and learned discussions with Rosmini, against the splendid scenery of Lake Maggiore. The young Ruggero Bonghi left a detailed record of such conversations in his book entitled, “*Le Stresiane*”.

Towards the middle of August 1854, Rosmini wrote his will, leaving all his possessions to the Institute of Charity, having a little earlier made arrangements for the well being of his brother Giuseppe, who had married the noble woman Adelaide de’ Baroni Cristani. He then returned after an absence of seven years to his native Rovereto.

It was during his last visit to Rovereto that a mysterious and dramatic event occurred to him. He had been invited for a meal by an aristocratic family very close to him. In the evening of the same day he felt very ill, and after a very bad night he failed to appear for the celebration of Mass in the morning. His sister-in-law Adelaide went to his room to see what the problem was, and as she entered the room she saw him trying to walk, unsteady on his feet and helping himself with a stick.

She asked him how he felt, and he replied, "*My dear, I have been poisoned; yesterday, at dinner, as soon as I had the soup I knew I had been poisoned*".

Since she could not believe it, he told her the name of the person he thought had done it. He never said another word to anyone else about this incident, and refused to see a doctor for many days. Countess Adelaide believed that the reason for this behaviour was the fear Rosmini had of causing suspicion and embarrassment for the family that had invited him, and he knew very well that none of them had any part in it, but it had been the work of one of the guests at table who had had grudges against Rosmini in the past.

Countess Adelaide felt obliged to secrecy, until, nearly twenty years later, she came to know that there had been another attempt to poison Rosmini a few years earlier, in 1852. It had happened at Stresa, when a stranger had asked Antonio Carli to put some poison in Rosmini's food, after the promise of money. The faithful servant had looked at the stranger in great disbelief and fright, and the man then made his way out immediately, disappearing into the night.

Her witness was given to Fr. Lanzoni, Fr. General at the time, Fr. Paoli, Fr. Setti, and Mr. Zamboni and the signed record was put into the archives.

It is a fact that, after that incident, Rosmini's health never recovered. He suffered from intense intestinal pain, and no cure was ever found to alleviate his conditions. He had been in poor health for most of his life, and had always suffered from liver troubles, but the intensity and persistence of this illness was quite different.

He returned to Stresa, and spent winter alternating long periods in bed with others that allowed him to do some work. But it soon became clear that he would not recover. From the beginning of May 1855 his conditions deteriorated considerably and he was forced to bed.

As the news of his grave illness spread, there was a continuous flux of friends who came to pay their 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. Very moving was the meeting between the old and nearly blind friend Tommaseo and

Rosmini who had not seen each other for over twenty years. After embracing him warmly, Tommaseo said, *“Apart from the grey hair, you have not aged!”* Rosmini answered quoting from the Psalm, *“You make happy my youth”*; *“But it will not be renewed like an eagle”*, answered Tommaseo with another quotation from the Bible, as they used to do during their University days at Padua. They spoke with great passion about literary topics and at the end Tommaseo assured Rosmini that he would come again to see him.

He came back a few weeks later, just in time to receive the very last goodbye. On that occasion, Tommaseo 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”*.

The many friends who came and stayed till the very last moment of his precious life had an opportunity to see his extraordinary faith, patience, and endurance in suffering without raising a lament, and his face always open to a smile to welcome anyone who came.

“Dear Bonghi – he said to his young friend from Naples – behold, I am in between two worlds, the world of vanity and the world of truth. It will not be long before I appear before God: all my trust is placed in Him. Yes, our hope is all in Jesus Christ, in our union with Him. Let this be also our glory”.

On the 16th June, his greatest friend Alessandro Manzoni came to see him. He himself had been ill and could not come earlier. *“Oh, my dear Rosmini, how are you?”* said Manzoni; *“I am in God’s hands, hence I am well. But you, dear Manzoni, why come so soon after your illness?”* *“I would do much more to see my Rosmini”*, answered Manzoni. *“Well, you wished to show your kind friendship, moreover Manzoni will always be my Manzoni in time and eternity”*. Manzoni then said, *“Let us hope the good Lord will keep you here with us and give you time to bring to conclusion the many beautiful works that you have started. Your presence among us is too necessary”*. *“No, no – said Rosmini – no one is necessary to God. The works that God has begun He will bring them to fruition. I am afraid I may be a useless and even damaging obstacle. This fear helps me to accept death, better*

still, it makes me desire it...” As he said this, he took Manzoni’s hand and kissed it. Manzoni, embarrassed, was hesitant about doing the same, he did not want to put himself at the same level of his friend; he went by Rosmini’s foot and kissed it. Rosmini protested, *“This time you win, I have no strength...”*

A few days later, as Manzoni asked Rosmini, *“What will we do without you?”* Rosmini answered leaving his spiritual testament, *“Adore, Be Silent, Rejoice”*.

Death arrived at one thirty in the morning of 1st July 1855, after eight hours of intense agony. It was the feast of the Most Precious Blood of Jesus, the great feast of the love of God *“usque ad finem”*.

Ruggero Bonghi, when announcing his death to the Italian people, said, *“One of the greatest minds and the holiest men to have lived in Italy in this century has left this world. He has left us a legacy of affection and ideas; his brethren and his friends will take care of the one, it falls to the Italian people to cultivate the other. All of us feel uplifted as we recall his memory”*.

The archbishop of Turin Lorenzo Gastaldi, who had known Rosmini over a period of many years, thus summarised his life:

“I have always admired in him a most lively faith in God, a firm and unshakeable hope in God and Divine Providence, a generous and heroic offering of himself daily to God and to his neighbour, a most pure piety, a most fervent love for the Holy Catholic Church and for the Holy See, a most profound humility, a most perfect Christian endurance before all trials. He showed himself at all times a holy priest full of the Holy Spirit, and a precious vessel chosen by God for the Church, to promote a clear understanding of the doctrines of St. Thomas Aquinas, and to provide powerful philosophical basis to a renewed Catholic Theology.



Casa Bolongaro at Stresa, where Rosmini died



ROSMINIAN PHILOSOPHY

CHAPTER 1

THE “ROSMINIAN QUESTION”

THE “ROSMINIAN QUESTION”

“The devil knows the Institute of Charity much better than our opponents”, said Rosmini during the difficult times of the approval in Rome of the Constitutions. We, perhaps, may be excused for saying, *“The devil knows the value of Rosmini’s philosophy much more than his opponents”*.

His teaching was covered by the dark clouds of violent opposition from a small current within the Church and from a few individuals within the Society of Jesus, who rejected his approach of constant dialogue with modern philosophy, and his freedom from stale and antiquated formulations and methods that no longer spoke to the minds and hearts of those who were searching for the truth.

We have seen how this current of opposition managed, with the help of Cardinal Antonelli, to have two works of Rosmini placed in the Index of books condemned by the Church. We have also seen how a subsequent examination of all the works published by Rosmini was concluded with a complete

absolution, the *Dimittantur* of 1854.

It should have been the end of the persecution against Rosmini; this is what Pope Pius IX had hoped. Instead, soon after Rosmini’s death, the attacks of the opponents restarted, cautiously at first, until the death of Pius IX in 1878.

After the first Encyclical letter, *Aeterni Patris*, of the new Pope Leo XIII, in 1879, by which the Pope sanctioned the return in Seminaries and among Catholic scholars of the study of St. Thomas Aquinas, the attacks on Rosmini intensified.

His philosophy was presented as opposing the theology of St. Thomas, and therefore, contrary to the indications of the Holy Father. The Jesuit Fr. G. Cornoldi published a book with the telling title, “Rosminianism, a synthesis of ontologism and pantheism”.

Others began collecting propositions from works of

Rosmini, especially the ones published after his death and left unfinished by him, *Theosophy*, and *Commentary to the Introduction to the Gospel according to St. John*. The propositions were made up of sentences found in the books, but taken out of context, or put together from different paragraphs. The result was that Rosmini was accused of ontologism, pantheism, of denying creation, of confusing the natural and supernatural order, of denying the direct creation by God and the immortality and unity of the soul, and so on.

The decree of condemnation of the “*Forty Propositions*” of Rosmini by the Holy Office was promulgated in 1888. It was known as the “*Post Obitum*”: “*After the death of Antonio Rosmini there came to light in his name various writings in which several doctrinal topics were expounded and expressed... which did not seem conformable with Catholic truth... Such 40 propositions are condemned...*”

Fr. Lanzoni, successor of Rosmini as General of the Institute, did what Rosmini had done in 1849, by submitting humbly, simply, and without hesitation to the decision of the Church. He wrote a moving letter to all the Superiors of the Institute:

“Our obedience today is put to a stern test; but we must obey authority and do the Will of God... I beg you all, for the love of Jesus Christ, who was obedient unto the death of the cross, to refrain henceforth from teaching, defending or in any way maintaining these forty propositions, and to require the same obedience from all the brethren entrusted to your care.

After all we are not philosophers but religious, hence we shall continue to serve peacefully our beloved Lord, both “in ill repute and good repute”, occupying ourselves zealously in the works of charity we have undertaken, and applying ourselves with all our heart to our own sanctification. Console yourself by recalling the solemn words of the Apostle St. Peter, “Humble yourself, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that in due time He may exalt you. Cast all your anxieties on Him, for He cares about you”

One can imagine the effect produced by the condemnation of Rosmini. The opponents rejoiced at their tremendous victory; the name and the figure of Rosmini became immediately associated with the worst heretics who had done incredible damage to the Church. The people who loved Rosmini perceived in the depth of their being a most acute suffering for seeing

truth treated so arrogantly and mercilessly: was not Rosmini a most holy, humble, devout son of the Church? Had he not toiled to the exhaustion of himself to defend, serve the Church? Did he not write at the command of the Popes after an extraordinary preparation to know the mind of the Church through her teachings, the Fathers of the Church, the great Christian thinkers? ***Moreover, was it not clear that Rosmini had never written the 40 Propositions condemned by the Church since they did not reflect his true teaching but had been “constructed” by his opponents?***

The Institute of Charity and the Sisters of Providence went through their own most difficult period, with very unclear future. The words of Cardinal Wiseman to Fr. Pagani in 1851 resounded harshly in the minds of Rosminians after the condemnation of the forty propositions: *“I do not want the priests of your Order to preach in my diocese, since your Founder has works condemned by the Church”*.

The Rosminian Question kept Rosmini and his teaching under a cloud for over a century; some progress was made by various writings defending Rosmini in more favourable times, but the real breakthrough came with Vatican II.

John XXIII valued Rosmini to the point of conducting his own retreat on Rosmini’s *Maxims of Christian Perfection*; Paul VI considered *The Five Wounds* a “*prophetic work*”; it was under the Pontificate of John Paul II that Rosmini’s name was finally and definitely cleared by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 2001; and now Pope Benedict XVI, a great thinker himself, has blessed and sanctioned the beatification of Rosmini.

It is regrettable that a great Christian philosophy and theology have remained neglected and so little known until our own times. The problems that Rosmini dealt with are very much the problems of today, only made worse by the years and by the lack of profound and persuasive Catholic apologists.

This is why the beatification of Rosmini is so important: it clears Rosmini in a definitive manner and casts away any cloud from his teaching and his work. Moreover, it gives a fresh impetus to listen to a much needed voice that has been silenced for so long, and that provides most original and far reaching solutions to the problems of our era.



ROSMINIAN PHILOSOPHY

CHAPTER 2

WHAT ARE THE
MAIN ISSUES OF
PHILOSOPHY
TODAY?

WHAT ARE THE MAIN ISSUES OF PHILOSOPHY TODAY?

Is there an “*objective*” truth, universal, valid for every intelligent being now and for eternity? Or is truth “*relative*”, “*made up*”, “*constructed*” by the individual or by our own culture or by our own religion? The majority of philosophers today teach that “*the quest for objective truth is folly*”, that there is no objective truth, and that all truths are man-made, created by ourselves, by our society, by our religion. Therefore, there is no “*really true*” knowledge, morality, religion, philosophy: all is made up, all is “*relative*”, no morality, no religion, no system of truth is better than the others, they are all “*relative*” to each group. It is easy to see how this bleak conclusion brings with it scepticism and disintegration of values. *Rosmini deals with these problems in “New Essay concerning the origin of Ideas”, “Theosophy”, “Introduction to Philosophy”*

Is there a morality that can claim universal acceptance? Or

is morality created by ourselves, our society, our religion? Are there moral commands valid for every human being? Is morality “*true*” for people of all races and religions? The most common philosophical answer today is that morality is man-made, created by different cultures or religions, “*constructed*” by society, or made up by the “*taste*” or the “*emotions*” of individuals. Morality, therefore, is relative or subjective, and no morality can claim superiority over the others, since there is no objective truth in morality, and morality changes all the time. **Rosmini deals with these problems in “*Principles of Ethics*”, “*Conscience*”, “*A Comparative and Critical History of Theories about the Principle of Ethics*”**

Is there a God? Is it possible to prove rationally that God exists? The accepted answer today is that reason is incapable of proving the existence of God: all the traditional arguments

have been demolished by severe criticism, and the conclusion is that belief in God is a matter of personal preference or of blind “*faith*”. Marx, Freud, Nietzsche and many others have demonstrated that belief in “God” is a virus, an illness, an alienation; others, that it is simply an irrational choice based on no evidence. God and religion, therefore, are simply human “*constructions*”. See Rosmini’s “*Theosophy*”, “*New Essay*”, “*Supernatural Anthropology*”, and “*Rationalism*”.

It is fashionable today to talk of the human “*person*”, of “*personal*” relations, of education centred on the “*person*”. But, what is the accepted meaning of “*person*”? P. Singer, a very popular and influential philosopher, thinks that everyone would agree with his definition of person: “*a being who is aware of himself, capable of having memories of the past, and expectations and dreams for the future*”. On the basis of this definition, he declares all higher animals “*persons*”: dogs, cats, horses are “*persons*” because they can fulfil all the above requirements; on the other hand, foetuses, even newly born babies, and elderly people with dementia or other serious mental

illnesses are not “*persons*”. For Singer the concept of “*person*” is the guiding principle of important ethical choices: a “*person*”, whether animal or human, must be respected, protected, etc.; a non-person may be disposed of if the need arises. Abortion, euthanasia, embryo-experimentation, even infanticide may be justified since we are not dealing with “*persons*”. See Rosmini’s “*Anthropology as an Aid to Moral Science*”, “*Philosophy of Right*”, “*Psychology*”.

Do we have a spiritual soul? Are we made up of “*body*” and “*soul*”? Do we have a spiritual “*I*”, or an immaterial “*Mind*”? The widespread philosophical answer today is that there is no spiritual soul, spiritual I, or immaterial Mind: we are “*material*” beings, and our brain is capable of performing all that was once mistakenly attributed to a spiritual soul. So there is no inner I, nor soul: evolution tells us that the origin of the universe and of all in it – including humans – derived from a ball of gas, entirely material and subject to scientific investigation and laws. There is no place in the universe for an immaterial, spiritual substance: all is matter or physical energy. Talk of

“*soul*” is considered a remnant of superstitious beliefs prevalent in ancient times. Connected with this is the question of free will: matter is determined by physical laws, material humans, therefore, have no real free will but are, like all else, determined by physical laws. *See Rosmini’s “Psychology”, “Anthropology as an Aid to Moral Science”*

It is said today that the “*problem of evil*” is the most powerful argument against the existence of God. Can Christianity provide an answer to this problem? Modern philosophers reject St. Augustine’s solution to the problem, on the basis of evolution, of cruelty in the animal world, of the suffering of innocent people. Other Christian solutions have been subjected to the same fierce criticism and dismissed as incapable of answering the problem. Is there a Christian way forward for this problem? *See Rosmini’s “Theodicy”*

Individuals and groups today often speak of “*rights*”, even “*animal rights*”. Individuals, families, societies, nations claim “*rights*” and they all accept, formally at least, corresponding duties: but, what are “*rights*”? Are they privileges we are born with, hence “*natural*” rights or

are all rights “*acquired*” and “*granted*” to us by society? What is the essence of right? Are some rights at least universally binding? Most philosophers tend to dismiss the idea of “*natural*” rights in favour of “*positive*” rights agreed by the members of the society on the basis of self-interest. Others, especially in totalitarian regimes, tend to argue that all rights are given by society for the good of society over and above the individual. What is the Catholic answer to these questions? *See Rosmini’s “Philosophy of Right”, “Constitutions according to Social Justice”.*

What is education? Is it a fragmented acquisition of certain skills useful to society, to increase productivity and wealth? Is education a directing of young people to a career that will fulfil their ambitions and make them comfortable in life? Are the different subjects of human knowledge separate and disconnected from one another, or are they parts of a beautifully unified structure? What is the purpose of education? Is there a right for the Church to have Catholic schools? For what purpose? *See Rosmini’s “Essay on the unity of Education”, “On the freedom of Teaching”,*

*“On Christian Education”,
“Methodology”, “Logic”.*

It is clear that the problems raised above are “*our*” problems, and that they require urgent and valid solutions. Modern philosophy has provided our generation with very unsatisfactory answers, signalling a tremendous decline in moral, religious, personal values. They are also the problems studied most carefully by Rosmini to which he produced original, persuasive, valid solutions from the perspective of reason, in full convergence with the demands of Catholic faith and doctrine. For Rosmini there is no opposition between reason and faith; reason has all the means for dealing with its problems while at the same time demanding a fuller explanation which theology is ready to provide, according to the adage, “*Philosophy is the servant of theology*”. Faith and reason meet and call on each other, strengthening each other. In his Encyclical letter, “*Fides et Ratio*”, John Paul II acknowledged Rosmini’s contribution to a deeper understanding of this intimate relation.

A short booklet like the present one, meant for the general public, cannot deal but with simple indications of the answers given by Rosmini on some issues. For a

deeper and comprehensive study one has to engage in a much more specialised reading of the substantial volumes written by him, most of which are available in the English translation.



View of Sacro Monte Calvario



ROSMINIAN PHILOSOPHY

CHAPTER 3

IS THERE AN
OBJECTIVE,
UNIVERSAL
TRUTH?

It is obvious that the first problem of philosophy is whether truth is possible for our limited intelligence or whether in fact there is any truth at all; if it can be proven that we cannot reach truth or that objective truth does not exist then all our writing and discussing would simply be a waste of time. The answer for most philosophers today is that we cannot reach truth, or, as Wittgenstein puts it, *“the spade turns up”* every time we seek for objective truth. We only have *“relative”* truth, which is no truth at all.

Rosmini is known as the philosopher of the *“idea of being”*, and it is no exaggeration to say that the whole of his powerful system of truth is founded on this prodigious idea. The idea of being solves the problem of epistemology, it distinguishes man from any other being in the universe, it is the principle of Morality, Right, Education, it is the *“divine in nature”*, linking man to God and opening the way to natural theology. Moreover, the idea of being is the Truth.

The idea of being is the source of our knowledge of *“real”* being and of *“moral”* being: being is one, but in three modes, ideal, real, and moral; it is through

ideal being that we know real being; and it is from the relation between ideal and real being that we have moral being. It is easy from the idea of being to ascend to the Mind that thinks it from eternity, and to grasp something of the mystery of the Trinity, after its revelation from the Son *“who is in the bosom of the Father”*. Let’s begin at the beginning.

WE THINK “BEING”, WE HAVE THE IDEA OF BEING.

Rosmini, faithful to his method, begins with a fact: all human beings think *“being”* in a universal mode. What does it mean? It means that we can with our thought concentrate only on the most common feature of all things, ignoring all other qualities, and this is *“being”*. When we say, *“Reason is proper to humans, who have feeling in common with animals, and vegetable life in common with plants, but “being” in common with everything”* we are actually thinking of the most common feature possible to all things, and that is *“being”* in a universal mode. Try to understand this simple fact: to say that we have the idea of being is to say that we can think *“being”* in a universal mode, without any determination, as the last thing that remains in all our

thoughts if we take away from each of them all their qualities and characteristics. Take in your hands three different objects, a pen, a flower, a rabbit: if you disregard all their particular characteristics you will be left with existence as their most common feature. To think of existence without any determinations, any specific characteristics is to think “being” in a universal mode. All of us, therefore, can and do think of being in a universal mode.

“This fact is so obvious – writes Rosmini – that to mention it would be sufficient. Yet it is the extremely simple foundation of the entire theory of the origin of ideas. To think being in a universal mode means that we have the idea of being in all its universality; without the idea of being we cannot think being”.

WE CANNOT THINK OF ANYTHING WITHOUT THE IDEA OF BEING.

The first step then is to know the fact, that all human beings have the idea of being, the idea of existence in general. They all know what existence means. Why is this fact of such fundamental importance? Take the next step which is to notice that we cannot

think of anything without the idea of being, we cannot have any thought without the idea of being. All our ideas have the idea of being. This is the amazing discovery: there is no thought that does not contain the idea of being. And vice-versa, without the idea of being no thought, no idea is possible. No other philosopher had ever come to this clear conclusion which is of extreme importance. Let us see what it means to say that the idea of being is present in all other ideas.

Think of the dog you know so well with all its little quirks and habits. Now, take away with your mind all the specific traits of your dog: you are left with the idea of dog in general. Continue to take away with your mind all the characteristics of the dog in general, and you are left with the idea of animal, of something that has life, motion, etc. Continue the process: take away from the idea of animal in general all life, all motion, and you are left with the idea of a thing in general. Notice that you are all the time thinking “something” that is, having the idea. You can still progress further in your thinking: from your idea of a thing in general take away the idea of real existence, of a real entity and you are left with the very last possible

object of your thought, the idea of possible existence, the idea of being. You cannot go any further, since if you now take away even the idea of possible existence, then nothing is left for you to think, the object of your thought is gone. The idea of being is, therefore, the very last source of the idea of your dog, without it the idea of your dog cannot exist, cannot be thought. Notice that your particular idea of your dog is contained in the more general idea of dog, the more general idea of dog is contained in the general idea of animal, and the general idea of animal is contained in the even more general idea of thing, and the more general idea of thing is contained in the very last idea of being. In the same way that you cannot think of your dog without thinking that it is an animal, you cannot think of your dog without thinking “being”.

You can repeat the same process for any idea you have in mind: the result will be always that the very last possible abstraction from any idea whatsoever is the idea of being. You should begin now to realise the importance of such idea: it is to be found in all other ideas, no other idea is even thinkable without the idea of being! You are thinking now: you are thinking “being”! You may say, “*But I am not aware*

of thinking “being” when I am thinking”, and yet you are necessarily thinking “being” because “being” is contained in all your ideas, there is no idea without “being”. You are right to say that you may not be aware of it, but the fact is that if you think you think being, you think “something”.

One immediate consequence of this fact is that the idea of being is the source of all other ideas and, therefore, the source of all knowledge. You are aware of the infinite variety of our knowledge: geography, history, physics, anthropology, psychology, biology, politics, ethics, philosophy, and so on. Today, even more than in the past, we pursue specialisations in all fields and are aware of the immensity of all forms of knowledge. The idea that all this infinite number of pieces of knowledge can be given unity by one single idea, the idea of being, is mind-boggling. And yet, this amazing fact has just been analysed by us and found to be true: the idea of being, contained in all possible ideas, is the mother idea of them all, and all knowledge has its source in it. Rosmini compares all possible knowledge to a pyramid: at the lower end of the pyramid we find the infinite number of

particular ideas, the higher we ascend the more general are the ideas, fewer in numbers, and such that they contain what is under them; when we reach the top we find only one idea, the idea of being, the most universal and containing in itself all other ideas found below.

“All human knowledge could be represented by a pyramid in the form of a tetrahedron. Its base is immense and made up of countless individual truths, like so many stones. On top of these is laid another row of the universal truths closest to particular truths. There are a large number of them, but not as many as in the first row. As one gradually ascends to the tiers above, each row has a smaller number of truths with ever greater potentiality and universality until, at the summit, number itself disappears into unity. At this stage, universality has reached its full, infinite potential in the last tetrahedron at the summit of the pyramid” (Introduction to Philosophy, no.8).

WHAT IS THE ORIGIN OF THE IDEA OF BEING?

Let us proceed: so far we have seen that we all have the idea of being, we can and do think

“being”. Then we have seen that this incredible idea is actually part of all our ideas, it enters in all our ideas – therefore in all our thoughts. Indeed, there would be no other thought, no other idea if the idea of being should be missing. We can now ask: *“Where does this prodigious idea come from? What is the origin of the idea of being?”*

Rosmini engages in a complete and exhaustive search of all possible sources for this idea: the senses, myself, our spirit, reflection, but none of these traditional answers can withstand criticism, since they all hold that ideas come from subjective experiences, whereas the idea of being and all ideas have qualities which cannot derive from the senses or from subjective experiences. In particular, the idea of being is found to have the following characteristics:

1. Objectivity (sensations are our modifications; idea of being is independent of us, and cannot be changed by the thinking subject)
2. Possibility or Ideality (idea of being is intuition of possible beings)
3. Simplicity (absence of anything material, anything extended)
4. Unity or Identity (it is the

- intelligibility of all that is)
5. Universality (sensation is particular, idea of being applicable to infinite things)
 6. Necessity (what is possible can never be thought of as impossible)
 7. Immutability (idea of being is always the same, even if applied to many things)
 8. Eternity (possibility of being is not limited by time)
 9. Indetermination (being in all its universality is devoid of any determination).

The idea of being furnished with such characters cannot possibly derive from sensations that are particular, beginning and ending within our temporary modifications. It cannot come from the feeling of myself because this feeling, like all other sensations, is particular and restricted whereas the idea of being has completely different characteristics. Moreover in order to have the intellectual perception of myself I need to have the idea of being already. The feeling of myself is, in a sense, innate since it is with us right from the beginning of our particular existence; but the universal idea of myself, the intellectual perception of myself, is acquired by putting together the feeling of myself and the universal idea of being.

Having carefully examined all possible sources for the idea of being and failing to find a satisfactory one, Rosmini concludes that the only true origin of this universal idea, mother of all ideas and the unifying principle of all knowledge, is that it is given to us in all its light as the means whereby we can acquire knowledge. The idea of being is innate in us, is the “light of reason” that shines before our mind, it is not a production of our own spirit, on the contrary our mind contemplates the idea of being in its complete objectivity.

“That the idea of being is innate follows from what has been said:

1. *If the idea is so necessary and essential to the formation of all our ideas that the faculty of thought is impossible without it;*
2. *If it is not found in sensations, nor extracted by reflection from internal or external sensations;*
3. *If it is not created by God at the moment of perception;*
4. *If finally its emanation from ourselves is an absurdity;*

Then the only possibility left is that the idea of being is innate in our soul; we are born with the

vision of possible being but we advert to it only much later”

The idea of being is the light that enlightens our darkness, is the light that humans have and animals do not have. The cat has sensations like ours even better than ours, but it has not got the idea of being therefore it cannot have any idea at all. It has instinct and therefore instinctively moves towards pleasure and recoils from pain, but it cannot be aware of itself nor of the things of the world around so that it can pass judgments of the type, *“This is I, this is a chair, this is a book”*. Human beings, instead, are made intelligent from conception by the constant vision of the idea of being. The idea is independent of them –is given to them, always unchanging – and its light makes them intelligent.

THE IDEA OF BEING IS THE SOURCE OF ALL OTHER IDEAS.

The discovery of the innate idea of being solves the problem of the origin of ideas and provides a secure basis for all knowledge. Plato, Leibniz, and Kant failed to solve the problem by admitting far too many innate ideas: all our ideas are innate for Plato, only the “traces” of ideas are innate

for Leibniz, and for Kant the 14 categories are innate. By admitting too many innate ideas, all of them failed to identify the “mother of all ideas”, the fundamental idea which is at the basis of all ideas, the idea of being; their systems therefore cannot provide sure foundations for philosophy.

The Empiricists, on the other hand, did not admit any innate idea and failed, therefore, to explain the origin of the principles of logic, of other fundamental a priori ideas; moreover, they failed to explain the characteristics of all ideas, their universality, immutability, eternity, necessity, etc. Their systems therefore are also seriously vitiated and cannot be true.

The principles of logic, fundamental to all that we think and say, are intuitions derived immediately from the idea of being, and enjoying the same degree of certainty and truth. How do we get all the other ideas that provide us with knowledge about the real things of the universe, the ideas of things like “myself”, “tree”, “star”, “dog”?

The origin of all such ideas is easily explained once we recognise that the human subject is at once intelligent and feeling, has the constant vision of the idea of being

that makes him intelligent and has feeling which allows him to perceive all the sensations which the sensible qualities of bodies produce in him. The feeling subject is at the same time the intelligent subject. The matter of all our ideas is given in sensations felt by the human subject, the formal part of all ideas is given by the intellect that has as a constant object the idea of being.

It was Kant who had discovered that all our ideas of the world are made up of form and matter; the matter provided by sensations, the form given by the mind. His mistake was to say that the form consisted of 14 categories spontaneously produced by the mind on occasion of sensations. Rosmini argued instead that the form which is given by the mind – which is independent of the mind – is the simple idea of being which contains in itself all the 14 categories of Kant. When we see a tree, all the sensations caused by the tree in us are felt by us. But feeling the sensations is not having the idea; the sensations remain in total darkness, like in animals. We have the idea when our intellect provides the idea of being and makes the interior judgment, *“There is an object that causes the sensible qualities which are felt by me in sensation”*. We

can easily pass this judgment since we are at once intelligent and feeling subjects, we have all the ingredients for making the judgment and thus for acquiring the idea. This process is called by Rosmini, **“intellective perception”**, and is the way we acquire all our ideas of bodies, including our own body.

In the unity of the human subject we find intelligence and feeling, both innate, both necessary for the acquisition of all other ideas. We have seen that intelligence is the permanent vision of the idea of being, and we have noted the extreme importance of his discovery. But Rosmini’s brilliance is again in evidence in his profound assessment of feeling, dealing with it in a way that had never been done before.

THE DISCOVERY OF THE FUNDAMENTAL FEELING

Rosmini claims that we have a *“fundamental feeling”* of ourselves since conception. *“Life”*, for Rosmini, is the intimate conjunction of spirit and matter, of soul and body, which produces a fundamental feeling that remains constant and permanent until there is life. This fundamental feeling is at the basis of all other particular feelings which are felt in a part

of the body simply because the whole body is constantly felt by the fundamental feeling. The fundamental feeling is the feeling of our body reached by the nervous system, through which we feel our own life. It is through this feeling that we have a most intimate and unique perception of our own body which we feel as one entity with us.

If we did not feel our body in a constant and permanent way we would have great difficulty in explaining how we become aware of particular sensations in parts of our body; if we admit to its existence then it becomes clear that since we feel our body in a constant way we immediately become aware and feel the particular sensation that alters the status of the fundamental feeling in that part of the body.

It is true that it is very difficult to become aware of the fundamental feeling which is innate and constant. But having a feeling and being aware of it are two different things. Rosmini suggests an exercise to try to catch this feeling: *put yourself in a dark, peaceful place and keep still for a long time, trying to rid your mind of images and ideas of things; you will notice then that you can no longer perceive the boundaries of your body, the location of your*

hands, feet, and of all other parts. At that stage you should begin to perceive this fundamental feeling of the life of your body.

TRUTH AND CERTAINTY

The quest for certainty, for truth is the most noble and pressing endeavour for many persons. Modern philosophy in what we call the western world – especially in the Anglo-Saxon world – has resigned itself to the view that truth is simply unobtainable, that we must remain satisfied with “truths” that originate within our “form of life”, our cultures, our languages; man made, relative truths therefore.

Scepticism about truth is the most dramatic feature of our modern world; we live in a world that is deeply affected by a “crisis about truth”.

For Rosmini, the quest for truth does not take us far from ourselves, it does not imply the most laborious and painful investigation . Truth is with us since our conception! We are made “intelligent” by truth, which is the “idea of being”: we make use of the idea of being at all times since childhood, and there is no idea which is not “informed” by the idea of being, by truth. Truth walks

with us, is always before us: what an astonishing fact, capable of destroying the darkness of scepticism and of giving great hope to modern man.

We have been using the word truth and idea of being as synonyms, as interchangeable. In what sense can one say that the idea of being is the common truth? In what sense can one say that the light that enlightens every man that comes into this world is at the same time the idea of being and the truth?

What is the intimate connection between the idea of being and truth? We have seen that the idea of being is present in all our ideas, is the formal part of any idea whatsoever, is the last possible abstraction from any idea. We have seen that the idea of being, being the source of all ideas, is the source of all our knowledge, which is therefore one in its totality. The idea of being contains all other ideas and all possible knowledge. We can rightly say that the idea of being is the principle of knowledge.

But, what is truth? According to Rosmini, if we examine the different senses normally given by people to the word “truth” we can see that its most extensive meaning, its general

notion, and the unique essence properly indicated by it, is that of “*exemplar*” or “*original*”. He defines truth as the “*exemplar of things*”. The concept of exemplar includes a relationship with what is drawn from the exemplar, that is, with its copy. The copy is true when it is perfectly like its exemplar. Truth is the exemplar, things are true when they conform to their exemplar.

The exemplar of any object is its idea. The exemplar of the horse we see is the full specific idea of horse through which we know the truth about the horse. We know that the “*essence*” of anything is that which is thought in the idea of the thing; and the essence of anything is precisely the truth of the thing. The idea, the exemplar, contains the truth, hence Rosmini’s other definition of truth, “*Truth is an idea in so far as an idea is an exemplar of things*”.

There are as many “truths” as there are exemplar-ideas of things. There is the “truth” about the horse, the “truth” about the sun, the “truth” about the chair, etc. But there is also the “*Truth*” with an absolute sense, and always in the singular: this is the Truth which is attacked by the sceptics, or which we say is in “*crisis*” today. We know that

all ideas converge ultimately in the idea of being which contains them all; the idea of being is the mother of all ideas. Truth, therefore, is eminently contained in the idea of being; the idea of being is the Truth by which we know all things, is the Exemplar of all exemplars.

“The idea of being is that which represents all beings of any species whatever, and by which all beings are known. It is the idea to which all species are reduced, and could for this reason be called the “species of species”. The idea of being therefore can be called “truth” when it

is considered as the exemplar of things in so far as they are known by us. Hence, the idea of being is the one, universal, absolute “truth” by which we know all things, because it is the universal exemplar in which the equality of all things is expressed. St. Augustine gave truth this absolute sense when he defined it, “That which indicates being”, and again, “Truth is that which manifests what is””.

The presence of the idea of being in every human being is a fact, hence the presence of truth in every human being is also a fact.



Sacra di Si Michele, an ancient abbey given by King Albert of Piedmont to Rosmini



ROSMINIAN PHILOSOPHY

CHAPTER 4

THE HUMAN PERSON

THE HUMAN PERSON

Once we have the certainty that objective Truth is possible, we need to study carefully the subject of knowledge, that is, Man. Rosmini dedicated to this study a large volume entitled, “*Anthropology as an Aid to Moral Science*”, which is a profound investigation, based on careful observation, of the definition of Man, and the three volumes entitled, “*Psychology*”, that deal more specifically with the “*soul*”. It is obvious that the study of Man is the necessary step that makes possible other major philosophical works: Ethics, Politics, Rights, Education, and so on.

Ideas are essential for our knowledge of anything. They are of a different nature from things which are real and subjective. All ideas are made up of the idea of being and of the infinite number of determinations provided by the senses: the idea “*horse*” is the idea of something which is, and of the determinations given by the senses (shape, colour, taste, smell, texture, etc.). The idea of being is not the only

primordial element “*innate*” in us. There is another element essential for our knowledge of the world, the “*innate*” fundamental feeling whereby our soul feels constantly and permanently the body, and through which we can feel all other sensations. We would not be able to feel external bodies that stimulate or press on our body if we did not feel constantly our own body.

Our soul, therefore, from the moment of conception, is united to the body which is the term of its fundamental feeling and through which it feels all other sensations, and is united to the idea of being, the object of pure intuition, and through which it forms all other ideas with the help of the senses.

THE SOUL IS THAT WHICH “FEELS” IN US.

Human soul is the principle of an active, substantial feeling which, identically the same, has as its terms 1- extension (and in it a body) and 2- being. It is therefore at one and the same time sensitive

and intellective (rational).

The human soul is that first principle of feeling and understanding which, without ceasing to be one and to have a single radical activity, is constituted by something felt, extended and corporeal, and by something understood, that is, indeterminate being.

The soul is, therefore, a substantial feeling. Observe carefully, however, this word “feeling”. In the same way that one cannot have a Cheshire cat’s grin without the cat, there cannot be “feeling” without that which feels and that which is felt, without the soul that feels and the body that is felt. The conjunction of the soul to the body is what we call “life”, hence we can see how intimate the connection of soul and body is. Life always refer to sensation, and properly speaking, resides in the soul where alone sensation is present. However, life can be attributed to the body but only in so far as the body is intimately conjoined to the soul. Feeling is the distinguishing mark of a “living” creature, and animals are defined by Rosmini as “subjective beings with feeling”. The feeling principle in animals and in human beings is the soul.

However, soul and body are completely different and even opposed in their natures: the soul “feels”, the body does not feel but is the cause of sensation or feeling, the means whereby the soul feels. The brain, being body, cannot feel anything; it is the soul that is the subject of sensations. Yet, it is the most common mistake today among philosophers of mind to say that it is the brain that feels!

The soul, therefore, is essentially a principle that feels. All the feeling activities of the soul are expressed by us with the word “I” or “Myself”. The I is not the pure soul, because babies or whoever cannot say “I” have nonetheless their soul: the I is the soul that reflects on itself, is the soul perceiving itself, becoming aware of itself in its various operations. When we say “I read, I see, I wish...” the words express that we are doing the actions, and the soul is aware of itself doing the actions.

“I cannot doubt that I who feel, think, speak, am the soul. The soul, therefore, as I presently conceive it, is that being which I intend to express when I use the word “I”. The person who says “I” performs an interior act by which he enunciates his own soul. “I”, therefore, is the vocal

sign enunciated by an intellectual soul of his own act when he turns attention internally to himself and perceives himself". (Psychology, 69)

The way of acquiring knowledge of our soul is to begin from "myself", from my "I". It is in consciousness of our own soul that we can discover what the soul is. If we did not feel the soul in ourselves we would not be able to say anything positive about the soul.

The soul manifests the unity of the human subject, since the same soul intuits the idea of being and perceives his body, the "*I who feels is the same I who understands*". The primordial intellectual perception in a human being is the intellectual perception of himself: the feeling soul perceives the body with a fundamental and constant feeling, but this perception remains obscure and not an object of knowledge until it is enlightened by the light of the idea of being which is present in the human soul. The soul applies the idea of being to the felt body and perceives it as its own body intellectually, thus acquiring knowledge of itself.

The soul in animals is a feeling principle, but it has only

corporeal sensations. Animals do not intuit being, do not have the idea of being, therefore they can never reach awareness of themselves, they can never say "I", their feeling of the body remains constant but in total darkness. They react to the stimulations of their body and of bodies by the force of instinct.

THE HUMAN SOUL CANNOT BE A "BODY", AN EXTENDED SUBSTANCE

It is the fundamental feeling which constitutes the pure substance of the soul. The soul therefore is known to us, and as a simple feeling principle which is present in all parts of our body is a spiritual subject which excludes all possibilities of being made up of matter which is instead essentially "extended", and therefore separate in all points.

Every "body" can be divided ad infinitum, and each part of it will always be a separate unit, no matter how small. Even atoms are one outside the other. And if atoms are bodies, then they are extended and can be divided even further, in parts which will again be one outside the other. Extension is what makes a body a body. This divisibility of extended matter into an infinite number of parts each separate from the

other, forced ancient philosophers to admit to the existence of the soul, or of a principle which being un-extended and spiritual could give unity to the multiplicity of material points.

The soul can feel every part of an extended body, the soul can smell a rose while at the same time looking at its beauty and feeling the texture of the petals. This simple unity of feeling could not be possible if the soul were to be an extended body. If the soul should be said to reside in each part of the body, being part of the body itself, again it would be impossible for the soul in the toe to be aware at the same time of the soul in the shoulder, or of the soul in the brain. There would have to be as many souls as there are parts in the body, each separate from the others.

This is not our experience. Our feeling principle is one and through the fundamental feeling of itself reaches out to all other secondary feelings in any part of our body. It is the same I that smells the rose, admires its beauty, and feels the smoothness of its petals. It is the same I that feels every single part of the body. Only a spiritual, un-extended principle can join together so many different sensations and be the subject of all of them.

St. Augustine wrote, “*Sentire non est corporis, sed animae per corpus*”, that is, “*The body cannot feel, but it is the soul that feels through the body*”. It is not right to say, “*It is the eye that sees, the ear that hears, the brain that thinks*”, we should with more accuracy say, “*It is the soul that sees through the eye, that hears through the ear, that thinks through the brain*”, etc.

It is a most common mistake among modern philosophers of the mind to attribute to the senses all sensations, and to the brain all perceptions and thoughts. But the senses and the brain are simply parts of the body, that is, parts of an extended body which can be divided ad infinitum. It is true that the senses carry the impressions that will generate sensations. It is true that millions of neurons are on the move whenever we perceive anything or we think anything. But the “feeling” does not belong to the senses, nor the “understanding” – itself a spiritual feeling – to the brain: it is the soul, a simple, spiritual substance that feels and that understands. It cannot be otherwise.

THE HUMAN SOUL IS IMMORTAL

The soul is a substantial feeling. The feeling of the animal soul is purely corporeal. The feeling of the human soul is not only corporeal, but also intellectual and volitive. We have seen how intimate and essential is the connection of the soul to the body. Feeling requires that which feels and that which is felt, the soul and the body: the felt body cannot exist without the feeling soul and the feeling soul cannot exist without the felt body. We have also seen what happens to the soul of the animal when its body dies. But what happens to the soul of the human being?

The soul is life, and therefore when at death there is a separation of the body from the soul, the soul, essentially life, cannot die. We have seen that in this sense even the souls of animals will not die but will become feeling principles of other organised matter, more basic and primitive. But will the human soul survive as a human soul?

We have seen that the human soul is the principle of all sensitive, intellectual, and volitive acts, hence we have three proofs of immortality, the first from the fact that the soul is the principle

of life, the second from the fact that the soul enjoys the intuition of being, and the third from the fact that the soul has a will.

Death is the separation of the soul from the body: it is the body that fails in its organisation, that undergoes corruption and disintegration thus becoming incapable of being felt by the soul as its individual body. The soul, being a feeling principle that constitutes life, cannot die. The soul is simple, un-extended, immaterial: it is not subject to corruption and death, that is, disintegration of parts. The human soul, therefore, considered under the aspect of its union with a body, survives the death of the body: but does it preserve its substantive and subjective individuality? In animals, says Rosmini, the soul is preserved but it loses its individuality, its identity; and it becomes many feeling principles of other organised forms of matter, more primitive. The soul of the human being preserves its individuality and identity simply because it is not only an animal soul but also an intellectual and volitive soul.

The human soul is intelligent because it has the faculty of intuiting the idea of being from conception. The soul is made intelligent by the intuition of

the idea of being, which comes from God. The soul is joined, therefore, to the body but, more importantly, is joined to the idea of being in a permanent way. The idea of being is eternal, immutable, necessary, hence the intellectual soul is for ever conjoined to its eternal and immutable object.

When the body dies, the human soul retains its identity by the continuous presence to itself of the idea of being, and in the idea of being it sees all its cognitions, perceptions, idea of space, and memories. The immortality of the human soul is real and is depending on the fact that our soul has been made intelligent and has ideal being as the constant object of its vision, an object which is infinite, universal, divine. Through the vision of this object, the soul can also see all other personal characteristics, ideas, and affections that contribute to its own unique identity and individuality.

“I have demonstrated the immortality of the human soul by starting from the principle, “The nature of every subject is determined by its term”. The human soul, by having as its term being in general which of its nature is eternal and impassible, must itself be eternal”.

Another proof for the immortality of the human soul is drawn from the moral quality of human persons. This argument is common to ancient and more modern philosophers. Here is what Rosmini says:

“Seeing that rights were not always safeguarded in this life, they realised that another life must exist in which equality will be re-established between the over-abundance enjoyed by the wicked here below, and the undue suffering of the good. But how are we to explain why justice must be triumphant? Because, I say, justice is of its nature immutable and eternal. But this eternity proper to justice is based solely on the eternity and immutability of being which shines in the human mind”.

THE GENERATION OF THE HUMAN SOUL

Is our soul created directly by God? Do our parents pass on to us the soul in the same way as they pass on to us our body? The majority of people think that the soul comes from God, at the moment of conception. Rosmini has an interesting view on this issue.

Rosmini agrees fully with St. Thomas that the human soul

cannot possibly be generated from the body. But can souls be generated from one another? He mentions the opinion of St. Augustine who did not feel sure about the answer to this question: *“With regard to this matter – says Augustine – I have not ventured in my writings to express a definite opinion, nor imprudently to commit to writing for the instructions of others that which I cannot explain for myself. It would take me too long to explain the motives which move me not to incline to one opinion rather than to the other, but to keep myself undecided between the two”*.

Thus, St. Augustine did not reject the explanation of those who maintained that all human souls are derived originally from the soul of Adam, and that this only was immediately created by God. According to Rosmini, the human soul is a principle of substantial active feeling, which, while remaining identical, has for its terms a “body” in extension, and the “idea of being” or existence, on which account it belongs to its nature to be essentially sensitive and intellectual.

Now, as a purely sensitive and immaterial principle of animal life, the soul, as in the case of animals, is transmitted by

generation together with the body, to which it gives unity by feeling it as a whole. The body which parents pass on is not a dead body but a living one, like the bodies of the parents from which it is generated. The new organised body is immediately felt by its own immaterial feeling principle, whose nature it is to be inseparably united to the body. This soul is not human soul yet, because the human soul is not only sensitive but also essentially intellectual. In order for this sensitive soul to become a fully human soul it must be created into another substance, different from a purely sensitive principle.

This is precisely what is effected by the creative act of God, which, according to a fixed law of Creation, provides that “in the very act” whereby the sensitive animal principle becomes by generation the centre of a new development as the supreme principle of the organisation and life of the body, it shall be “illumined” also by the “intellectual light” which comes direct from God Himself. This illumination raises up in the substance of the soul a corresponding activity to receive that light by an act of intuition which makes the soul substantially different from what it would have been had the

soul only been a purely sensitive principle.

Thus, we may distinguish two causes co-operating to originate the human soul, although that which gives it identity as a human soul is the creative act of God. The first cause operates according to the **Law of Generation**, according to God's words to Adam, "*Increase and multiply*"; the second cause is to be attributed to God's **Law of Illumination**, to which St. John refers when he says, "*The Word was the true light which enlightens every man that comes into this world*".

Both laws, according to Rosmini, operate simultaneously at the moment of conception of a new human being.

WILL AND FREEDOM

Sensation and intellect are passive faculties, the former receiving the action of internal or external bodies, the latter receiving the light of reason. To every passive faculty there is a corresponding active one, instinct as a reaction to sensation and the will as a reaction to what is intuited by the intellect. Instinct drives the animal to pursue pleasurable sensations and to recoil from painful ones; the will directs the

human subject to acknowledge and love what the intellect presents as being or truth.

The will is a complex faculty that develops with age; the will of the child is only an "*affective*" will, wanting what is pleasurable on the basis of experience not of judgment. Later the child progresses to wanting pleasurable things on the basis of knowing that they are good for him, but he is still unable to distinguish between greater and lesser goods, immediate or delayed goods.

A further important stage is when the child passes from merely affective to "*appreciative*" will, when he is able to evaluate the known objects and choose one over the other; although the choice is still based on instinct rather than on intelligence.

A quality shift happens when the subject comes to realise that there are other persons who have the same rights, needs, dreams, desire for happiness. At this stage, the subject begins to see people and things not as means to his own pleasure but as independent and valuable in themselves. This is the time of "*objective*" knowing, when we forget ourselves and consider the world as it is; persons and objects are acknowledged for what they are

and are “*willed*”, loved, valued as good in themselves.

It is at this moment, when a person is able to differentiate between good relative to oneself or subjective, and good relative to others or objective, that the conflict between the two orders of good begins: it is the moment of decision for the will, which will pursue one rather than the other. It is at this crucial moment of choice between the subjective and the objective that we experience the faculty of freedom. It is freedom that will make the choice between the two conflicting goods, hence freedom in humans is qualified as “*bilateral*”, it can choose one or the other. In this choice man has no other master but himself: freedom is the apex of man. The act of freedom engages the whole man, since it directs all other active faculties (instincts, volitions) towards the decided purpose.

Freedom, born of reason, is not easy, since it has to compete with passions, customs, desires, affections, persuasions, habits, conditioning, all forces that do not easily conform to the categorical demands of the “*intelligent will*”.

The intellect, in conclusion, sees the truth of things, knows things as they are; freedom determines the will to either acknowledge, love, embrace the known truth or to reject it, or distort it, or hate it; the action follows from the choice of the free will.

THE HUMAN PERSON

One can immediately understand why the “*person*”, the seat of intellect, freedom, and will, is the supreme principle in a human subject. All human instincts derive from the subjective fundamental feeling, but intellect, freedom, and will derive from objective being, since their acts follow necessarily from the intuition of being and truth. It is the link with the object seen by the intellect and freely willed, that gives the human person the infinite dignity that makes the person an end and never a means. It is because human beings are “*persons*” that they are infinitely valuable and endowed with an infinity dignity.

Rosmini defines person “*a substantial, intelligent subject, in so far as it has a supreme and incommunicable principle of activity*”, that is a free will. Since it is the intellect and the free will that makes one a person, then every human being is a person from conception since its soul is

enlightened by the idea of being at conception, making the new human subject intelligent and endowed with free will, even if the full use of such faculties is not immediate or may become impaired at any time later.

To sum up, the will, which is the constitutive of personhood, is the active, supreme principle in man. As such, it directs and binds together all other principles, setting them in their proper order, and using them as means to achieve the moral perfection to which personhood is called to by the constant link with the idea of being, and ultimately, with God.





ROSMINIAN PHILOSOPHY

CHAPTER 5

PERSON AND MORALITY

People engage in many activities using skills and abilities, to great effect at times. They may become expert scientists, doctors, athletes, musicians, and yet their achievement is not a guarantee that they have become “good” persons. One can be an expert musician and a morally evil person. We may be able to better one or the other of the aspects of our human nature, but in order to be “good” morally we need to engage fully with our intelligence and our will to better the whole person, we need to educate our will to acknowledge and love the truth presented to us by our intellect. A sound education has always as end the moral perfection of the person, intellect and will, not simply the development of aspects of human nature.

It was Kant who based morality firmly on categorical imperatives that must be followed simply because they are the duties of a moral person, and not for other secondary aims like happiness or temporal or eternal rewards.

For Rosmini also morality obliges and commands unconditionally, since it is based on eternal, impassible, unchanging truths which demand reverence and obedience. Morality derives its commands from the idea

of being, and it takes from it the qualities of necessity, immutability, universality, and objectivity proper of being. Morality, therefore, does not issue from ourselves, as for Kant, but from being which is given to us as the light of our intelligence, objectively true, of divine origin. And since the idea of being is innate, so is morality; and, like being, it is the same for every “*man that comes into this world*”, with no distinction of race, religion, culture, or time.

Rosmini proves that morality issues from the idea of being by taking a moral law, any moral law would do, and noticing that the law is a “notion” of the mind, an idea, which, like all other ideas, requires for a full explanation an ascending series of more general ideas, which eventually terminate in the idea of being, as the only source and origin of all ideas.

The idea of being is, therefore, the notion which we use to produce all moral judgments, and is itself the very first law which can be stated as, “*In what you do, follow the light reason*” – not of reason which can be fallible, but the “*light*” of reason which is infallible.

If the object of morality is “good”, in what sense, then, is “being” connected to good? The common definition of good is “*that which is desired*”, in which definition we can distinguish the enjoyment and the perfection enjoyed. The enjoyment is clearly subjective, but the perfection enjoyed is the perfection of someone or something which can be considered independently from any subject.

“Perfection –says Rosmini– means an order intrinsic to things, corresponding to their most desired state”. We derive such definition first of all from our own experience, for we know that when all parts in us work in perfect order and harmony, causing a habitually pleasant sensation, we consider this orderly state a bodily perfection.

Next, we make similar observations of all other animate, sensitive beings, and these are seen as perfect when all their parts and every thing in them maintains their order, which seems to produce for them the most pleasant existence. Finally the intellect sees that even external, inanimate objects have their own perfection when they are in a certain state, form and composition proper to them. Good, then, is what belongs

to the nature of a thing and harmonises with the nature’s principle of existence. Everything tending to destroy a nature is considered opposed to it and harmful and evil. In conclusion, everything is good in so far as it is, in its intrinsic order.

“Being and good therefore are the same. ‘Good’ is ‘being considered in its order’, and the order, when known, is enjoyed by the intelligence. ‘Good’ is ‘being as felt’, in relationship with the intelligence, in so far as the intelligence sees both what every nature requires and that to which it tends with its forces”.

We need to distinguish between subjective, objective, and moral good. A subjective good is good relatively to a subject enjoying it. The perspective is from the subject’s point of view, and it may indicate a negative approach when, ignoring that things are good in themselves in so far as they are, they are called evil simply because they are not compatible with the enjoyment by the subject. It may indicate something positive when each subject is seen as tending unceasingly and in an orderly way towards self-realisation, full growth, and, for intelligent subjects, happiness, and ultimately God.

We have objective good, on the other hand, when we consider solely the perfections of things as they are in themselves, and for themselves, not relatively to other beings. We contemplate the intrinsic order of being of things, and we acknowledge and appreciate things for what they are.

Moral good is precisely this appreciation of objective good, which moves our will to love it, respect it, and acknowledge it in its proper order. Intelligence can look at any good in itself, in a disinterested and just way, giving to each its own. Ethics is thus concerned with duty and obligation towards an object considered in itself by the intelligence, not with pleasure and self-interest which in the last analysis always has its focus on the subject rather than the object.

The morally good act has objective good as its term, contemplated and judged good by the intelligence. A being is not morally good when it seeks its own pleasure and satisfaction, since it loves itself rather than good. It depreciates good, it corrupts it by using things for its own end.

A morally good subject loves good for its own sake, in its proper nature as good, as intelligence shows it to him. He loves good wherever it appears to him; he loves every good, and by contemplating good attains willingly the pure, noble joy that naturally results in a good, intelligent subject from good as known. And because intelligence is formed by the vision of universal being, morality is formed by universal love – the love of all beings, of every good – love which extends as far as knowledge, infinitely.

“Follow the light of reason” is therefore equivalent to “Love all beings”. The light of reason shows us all beings, and presents them so that we may love them; the light of reason shows us what is good in every being and reveals the interior order arising from the very constitution of being.

Objective good is moral good but becomes such only when desired by a will. Only when the subject wills the good which he knows does good as willed begin to be moral good. The will is the active power of human intelligence; moral good is, in the last analysis, *‘the objective good known by the intelligence and desired by the will’*.

The first moral law could be stated more precisely: “*Desire or love being, wherever you know it, in the order or degree in which it presents itself to your intelligence*”. But, how do we know the “order of being”? The order of being is being as it is, neither more nor less, and hence as it is conceived by the intelligence which conceives all that is, as it is. Intelligence weighs and measures the different degrees of being. For example, it is evident to the intelligence that a being without feeling – a stone, a plant – is inferior to a being which feels – an animal. The intelligence sees that the non-feeling being does not exist to itself, and hence lacks the mode of being possessed by any being that feels. It judges that a being which feels has a nobler degree of existence, far greater than the one that lacks feeling.

In the same way, the intelligence has only to perceive on the one hand a being which feels, and on the other an intellectual being, to compare them in an immediate, easy judgment, and discover that the latter is far superior to the former. The sentient being is unknown to itself, and consequently nothing in the order of knowledge; the intellectual being knows that it exists and feels, and in doing so possesses a

third activity or mode additional to the other two. In virtue of its intelligence, the subject has an act of being that reaches out to the infinite, uniting itself with being in general. By this union, the subject is informed by and shares in an infinite capacity, that is, the capacity for the infinite.

Greater being must be loved in preference to lesser being, and greater good in preference to lesser good; to love lesser being or good in preference to greater being or good is not true love of being or good, but an illusion of love; it is effective hatred and immorality, and a desire for evil, which is simply a privation of good.

One can see the philosophical basis for the commandments of love, “*Love God, Love your neighbour*”: God is the absolute Being, the absolute Good, he must be loved above all else; the human person is next in degree of being, above all other created things in the universe, and possessing an infinite dignity that makes him an end by his direct link to the idea of being, the “*divine in nature*”, coming from God.



ROSMINIAN PHILOSOPHY

CHAPTER 6

EDUCATION

One of the great laws used by Divine Providence in the governance of the universe is the “*law of germs*”, whereby all things appear in this world in a basic state with the potential of developing fully and beautifully into their own perfection.

God is the great Educator of the human race; and the whole universe, both in its physical make up and in the succession of historical events and circumstances, is the “great text” given by Him by which we learn and grow. He instructed humanity by revealing Himself progressively, by giving laws and commands to guide human beings, like a teacher leading his pupils: “*Like a father educates his child, so the Lord your God has educated you*” (Deut.8, 5).

Education is a complex art whereby various parties work together to bring to full development all the faculties of the human subject, parents, teachers, society, religion. It is a noble art that carries with it the hopes of generations, but it is also a most difficult and controversial endeavour.

In order to educate others to their full perfection one needs to have a profound understanding

of what a human being is, and of what constitutes the essential potentialities and faculties of human beings. There cannot be a sound education without a true epistemology and anthropology.

Rosminian education is based on the powerful philosophical foundations we have mentioned above, the possibility of knowledge, the existence of objective truth, the definition of man centred on the three essential faculties of feeling, intelligence, free will, a profound understanding of “person”, the moral principles that guide a person to moral good, and ultimately to God.

Education is possible because objective truth is possible. It is symptomatic of our modern world that, because of the profound crisis over the existence of truth, education has become more and more fragmented, more and more technological, a mere acquisition of skills for utilitarian purposes. This fact explains, among many other things, the fascination with “*league tables*” and other means for “*measuring*” results.

We have seen that for Rosmini man cannot do without truth; he is intelligent only because of his constant vision of ideal

being, of truth. He wrote in the “Philosophy of Right”: “*God the Creator attached men to truth by their own bowels*”, if men detach themselves from truth they mutilate, corrupt, destroy themselves. Human nature is for truth, and a person grows in maturity and perfection the more he searches for, discovers, and loves the truth.

If knowledge is possible because truth is attainable, then it is necessary to investigate carefully the various faculties and possibilities of the “subject” of education, the child, so that all efforts can be geared towards helping him to develop them harmoniously, in the right hierarchical order. It is often a mistake in education to concentrate on the growth of a section of man, to insist on some qualities or talents ignoring the others, or to approach subjects in an exclusive and disconnected way. Rosmini distinguishes between formation of human nature and formation of person, the former interested in developing aspects of one or the other of human faculties, or of individual talents, the latter instead concentrating on the harmonious growth of all the main constituents of the human subject, mind, heart, feeling, instinct, intellect, reason, will,

nature and super-nature.

The person is the supreme principle of the human subject, hence the child must be educated to direct to the perfection of the person all his faculties and talents. If the aim of education, and its fundamental unity, is the perfection of the person, then parents, teachers, society, Church should value schools as places where the formation of persons is cultivated, according to truth and moral good.

We have seen that for Rosmini man is “*an intellectual and volitive animal subject*”, or, more expressly, “*an animal subject endowed with the intuition of indeterminate-ideal being and with the perception of corporeal-fundamental feeling, and acting in accordance with the animality and intelligence it possesses*”.

Education based on personhood tends towards a full and harmonious development of the three basic faculties belonging to a child:

1- “**Feeling**” is the means whereby the child has a direct contact with the real things that make up the universe, starting with the feeling of “myself”, or “fundamental feeling”. In Baptism, the intelligent soul

of the child is given another “fundamental feeling” that allows him to “feel” God, opening up a new immense supernatural world through grace. Development of the body, of the senses, is therefore hugely important for the child, but not for its own sake but for the good of the whole person. What good would it be for a man, for example, to have a perfect, athletic body if he is morally evil?

2- **“Intelligence”** is the faculty that is made up by the innate, constant vision of the idea of being, and, hence, of truth. It is the means whereby a child acquires ideas and knowledge: of himself, of other people, and of the things of the universe. It is the faculty that opens up the mind to infinity, and leads him to God, the source of all being. Since the intellect, through the idea of being, sees things as they are in themselves and sees them in their order, it constitutes the first essential step to acknowledging and loving being, which is the condition for moral perfection. Pure knowledge, however, if not followed by “acknowledgment” does not improve the person; again, one may be a most knowledgeable man, and a very rotten human being!

3- **“Will”** is the supreme principle of activity which provides the basis of the incommunicable individuality that constitutes each human creature as a person. The intellect is a passive faculty, receiving the light of being; its active faculty is the will, that guided by the faculty of freedom, acknowledges – or rejects – the truth that has been presented to it. The will is the true seat of personhood, since it is the supreme principle to which all others obey, and the seat of morality. The formation of a “good will” is therefore the most important purpose of education.

For Rosmini man must tend to union with being, the whole of being, in order to reach his perfection. Now, being is one, but it has three modes, real, ideal, moral, and hence being is “*reality*”, “*truth*”, “*goodness*”. Man reaches out to real being through “feeling”, and hence to happiness; to ideal being through “intelligence” and hence to truth, and to moral being through “the will”, and hence to love and goodness.

For Rosmini, the wider the knowledge, the greater the possibility for love; knowledge is truth, and to love truth is to love all beings according to their order: God first, as Absolute

Being, my neighbour second as a finite being but with infinite dignity reflected on him by the idea of being, and all other things in their intrinsic order.

In a letter to a friend, Rosmini stresses the great importance of truth for education: *“The teacher must be convinced that to help children become good there is only one way, to insist on truth in all its extension, natural, incomplete truth, and supernatural, perfect truth. This latter truth is the grace of Jesus Christ, that operates in a hidden way, and from which alone comes salvation, all virtues, and human happiness”*.

From what has been said, it is clear that for Rosmini God is the beginning and the end of education, and this on strictly rational arguments. His philosophy, in fact, is a faithful fulfilment of Pope Pius VIII’s manifestation of God’s will to him, *“to take people by way of reason, and through reason to bring them to God”*

His philosophy is for believers and unbelievers alike, since his arguments are strictly based on reason, on meticulous observation of facts, on inescapable logical conclusions. Yet, Rosmini knows and proves

that what pure natural reason gives us is not sufficient to explain the whole story; it satisfies human rationality, but it clamours for a complete, even more ultimate reason, which only faith can provide. And since the issues are of fundamental importance, it does not make sense to ignore the full solution which can only come from acknowledging God as the Absolute Being, the source and origin of all that is.

For Rosmini, then, God is the final purpose of education, the One who gives it unity, light, and goodness: *“Education – he says – is either religious or is no education at all”*. Ultimately, a child is a person because of the infinite value that is given him by the intuition of ideal being, of divine origin: without God, the source of being, it would be impossible to find another ground for this “infinite dignity” of man, that makes him “unique” in the world.

The content of education, for Rosmini, is God, Man, and Nature. Religious Education is of fundamental importance, not only as knowledge of truths about God, but, more importantly, as the education of

the will to freely “acknowledge” Him, and to “love” Him with heart, mind, and soul (will, intelligence, feeling), the expression of the whole person.

For the study of Man, Rosmini stresses the importance of History, Philosophy, and the Classics. History is meant to embrace far more than universal traditional historical events, but also Literature, Arts, history of Philosophy, and any other subject that helps students acquire a wide and deep knowledge of the progress of Man through the centuries. The key to interpreting History is Philosophy, the science of ultimate reasons, shedding light on human development and investigations into the truth.

Teachers are responsible for the education of children in schools. They must acquire a thorough knowledge of each child, knowing that each is a world in itself, with a unique destiny: “*I think it is absurd to expect that all children should be moulded in the same way*”. It is often the case, says Rosmini, that some children become restless, making little or no progress for the simple reason that the teacher is not able to identify the best way to deal with each individual child on the

basis of the child’s actual needs. “*Give me good teachers, and even awful schools will soon be put right*”.

It is the mark of a good teacher the ability to “*think big*”, for “*only great men can educate other great men*”. Signs of such greatness are: the ability to combine easy presentation with depth of content, a moral coherence between teaching and life, a calm and assured communication, and a great care to nurture at the same time all the faculties of the person. Rosmini also argued that teachers should enjoy the freedom to teach their subject as they think most appropriate, without interference; they are actually guilty of “*cowardice*” if they allow themselves to be dictated about the method of teaching their subject!



THE SPIRITUALITY OF BLESSED ROSMINI

*“Father, you see into the depths of my
soul make me good”*

It is not possible here to present a detailed study of the spiritual teaching of Blessed Rosmini. We shall concentrate briefly on what has become a “*spiritual classic*”, a short booklet written for the “*disciple of Christ*”, which expresses fully Rosmini’s interior life, and which is the source of all other spiritual writings. The Constitutions of the Institute of Charity are simply a fuller treatment of the content of this small, but extremely precious spiritual book. John XXIII used it for his own spiritual retreats, and had it at his bedside.

The title of the book is, “**Maxims of Christian Perfection**”, published in Rome in 1830, as part of the spiritual mission confirmed to him as the will of God by Pius VIII. The Maxims were, first of all, the spiritual path followed by Rosmini in his life. They originated from his profound meditations on the Gospels: like the six jars containing “*wine of the best quality*”, the six Maxims are drawn from the Gospel and lead back to it. This is what Rosmini wrote about the Maxims:

“The book ought to be read over and over again, because it is not possible to savour it unless it has been ‘chewed and masticated’ all the time”

“I believe that the Maxims are never understood, discussed, meditated enough, opened up, and kept to perfection”

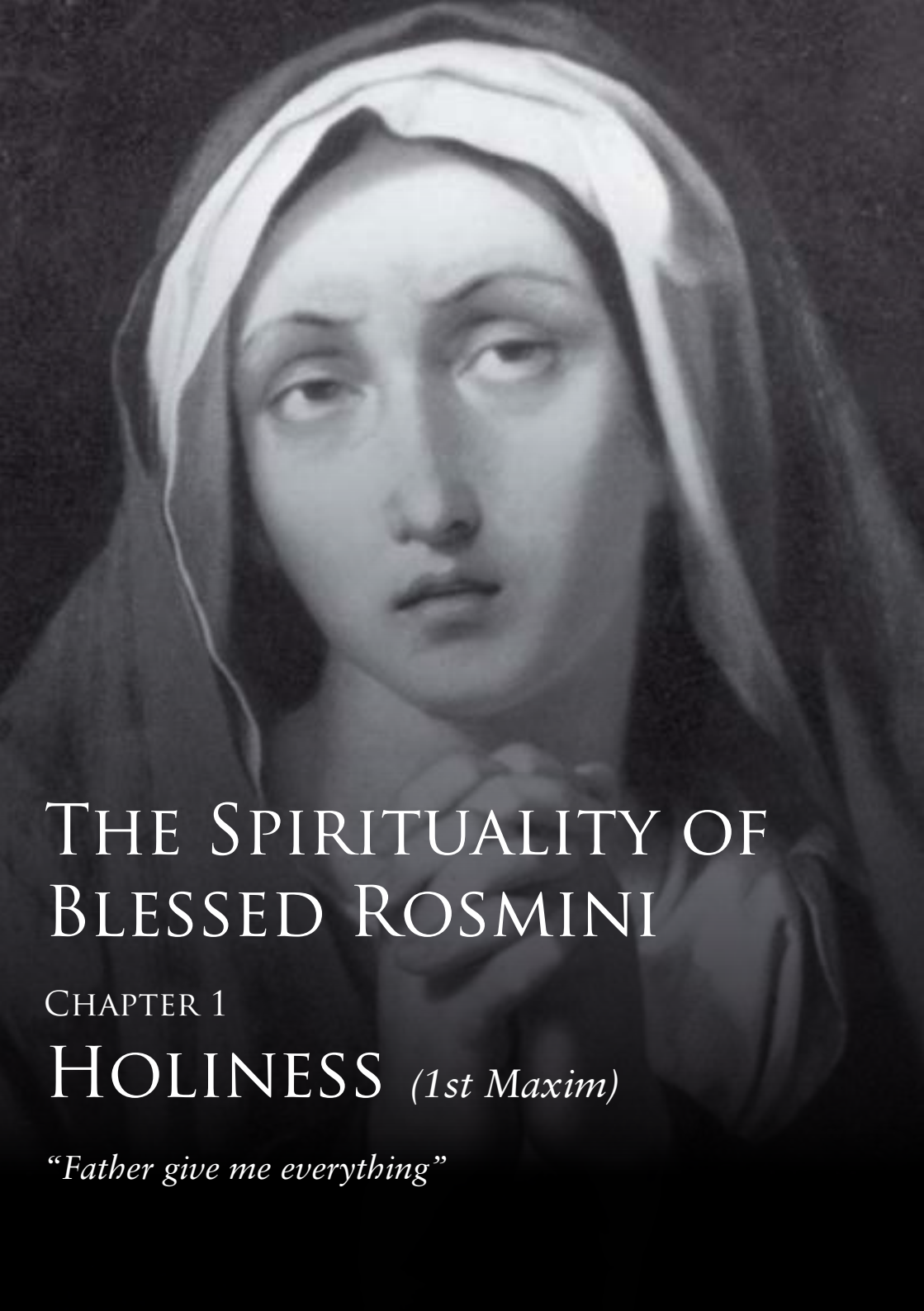
“This booklet is simply the essence of the Gospel. In my opinion it will be of greater spiritual benefit to you than anything else, because it teaches how we can direct and order everything to the supreme end, to the highest good to which we aspire and in which alone we find complete fulfilment”.

Like the parables of Jesus, each Maxim has a major theme, but the more one reads it the more one discovers new insights, new meaning, and new directions, truly a mine of great treasures. The six themes of the Maxims are:

1. **Holiness:** “*It is holiness that makes us dear to God*”
2. **Love for the Church:** “*We must love the Church and be ready to shed our blood for Her*”
3. **The Call to serve the Church:** “*Jesus is the Lord of his Church, wait in perfect peace and joy until He manifests His divine Will to us*”

4. **Divine Providence:** *“Let us abandon ourselves to the loving care of divine Providence”*
5. **Acknowledge our Nothingness:** *“By ourselves we are incapable of doing anything good”*
6. **The Will of God in our daily Life:** *“The Christian should never walk in darkness but always in the light”*





THE SPIRITUALITY OF BLESSED ROSMINI

CHAPTER 1

HOLINESS *(1st Maxim)*

“Father give me everything”

The call to holiness is a universal call: all Christians, by way of their Baptism, are born to supernatural life, and are sealed with the Spirit, the source of all holiness. It is not, therefore, something reserved to exceptional people; holiness is for everyone.

“All Christians, that is to say, all disciples of JESUS Christ whatever their state or circumstances, are called to perfection: for all are called to the gospel which is a law of perfection, and our divine Master was speaking to everyone when He said, “You must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Max.1.1)

What is holiness? *“Holiness or perfection consists in exquisite love of God and of our neighbour”,* it is a **“perfection of love”**. Love of God, first of all, since He is our Creator, expressed in the complete consecration of our will to the Will of the Father, in the imitation of Jesus. Love of God means to desire to please Him in all things, to give God the worship and glory that belong to Him.

Holiness comes from God alone, it is His gift. Our human nature may be gifted with many talents, and we may make good progress in the development of our human

qualities, all gifts from God. But our human nature cannot achieve anything at all in the supernatural life, by ourselves we are utterly useless: *“Without Me you can do nothing”, “Why call Me good? Only God is good”*.

What can we do then to achieve holiness? The very encouraging answer is that what we need to do is:

- **Have a great desire to be holy,** *“ardently long for holiness”,* have an *“insatiable desire”* for holiness: *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for holiness, for they shall be satisfied”*;
- **Pray constantly to grow in holiness,** in goodness, without being afraid of asking too much, since Jesus himself has already asked holiness for us from the Father, and He has assured us of this, *“If you ask anything of the Father, He will give it to you in my name”*. We must also know that *“the more we ask this from God the more pleased He is and the more ready to grant it to us”*.

Desire and Prayer, two easy ways for reaching perfection; it is necessary, however, to make sure that our desire is pure and sincere, and to achieve this, it is essential that we withdraw

into a complete interior solitude renewing all the time our desire for holiness. *“While immersed in this deep interior recollection he ought never to tire of asking for the same thing, according to the words, ‘Watch at all times, praying’.* We should not be discouraged if we discover that our attachment to external thing is still strong: the solution is always to *“have recourse to recollection and ceaselessly renew in our hearts the desire to be really holy”.*

What about “love of neighbour”?

The answer is that if we truly desire to be perfectly dear to God, Absolute Good, then we desire at the same time all that is truly good, and most of all the salvation of all our brothers and sisters.

ROSMINI AND HOLINESS

Rosmini’s life was dominated by the desire for holiness. His mind was full of the greatness of God since his very early childhood, and he found prayer a most natural and immediate occupation. The “*year of grace*”, 1813, was dominated by the thought of God: *“I discovered that there is no other wisdom but in God”*; his resolution to become priest was the immediate result of the momentous spiritual

discovery. His letters are constant reminders to friends, brethren, and people who sought his spiritual direction, of the “*one thing necessary*”, of the need to engage in the great work of “*saving our soul*”. His philosophical and theological writings had the only purpose to lead people to God, to help them discover the infinite beauty, wisdom, and love of God.

The early project of the Society of Friends had as its main purpose the mutual help of the members towards their own holiness; this aspiration of the young Rosmini became the foundation of the Institute of Charity. The Constitutions, in effect are a full and profound treatise on holiness, and from the start the aim of the Institute is forcefully and clearly declared:

“The end of this Society is to care lovingly for the sanctification of the members who compose it and, by means of their sanctification, to expend whatever longings and strength it has in all works of charity, and especially for the eternal salvation of every one of its neighbours.”

“The Institute consists of faithful Christians who, in their ardent desire of living as disciples of JESUS Christ, our Lord

and Master, apply themselves vigorously, with mutual help and encouragement, to their own perfection.”

Holiness was the object of his desire, and of his prayers. Fr. Francesco Paoli, his secretary for a number of years, wrote that Rosmini dedicated to prayer at least four hours every day, including one full hour meditation. However, Rosmini left a number of short prayers which he was in the habit of reciting constantly during day and night, spiritual aspirations which reveal his immense desire to be one with God:

“Father, I wish to pray to you as your divine Son would pray in me”

“Father, give me everything”

“Father, give me goodness; I was created for goodness; give me goodness”

“Father, you see into the depths of my soul, make me good”

“O my Father, give me that which is right for me, give me everything... according to the order of good”

“O my God, I was made for you: may I not lose you”

“O give me Christ, so that I possess him fully”

“O my Jesus! If I could but love you above all things, grant that I may love you”

“O my Father, do not abandon me”

After his Ordination, Rosmini withdrew from the active life and dedicated himself to the “*purification of his soul*”, immersed in profound contemplation and fervent prayer. It was during this time, in 1822, that he wrote a short poem which manifests that longing of his soul for God, “the solid rock” of his life:

“How blessed it is to speak to
 God,
 To talk of God,
 To be satisfied with God alone;
 To recall, desire, understand,
 know, love God;
 To seek and find God in God;
 Giving oneself wholly to God,
 Leaving God for the delights of
 God;
 To think, to speak, to work for
 God;
 To hope in God alone;
 To have one’s mind fixed on God
 always;
 Doing all things with God in
 God,
 Dedicated and consecrated to
 God,
 Pleasing God alone,
 Suffering for God,
 Rejoicing in God alone;
 To desire God alone,
 To abide with God forever,
 To exult in God in times of joy

and pain;
 To see, touch, taste God,
 To live, die, and abide in God;
 With God and in God, ravished
 by God and elevated to God;
 To offer God to God
 For God's eternal honour and
 glory
 O God, what joy and bliss you
 are!
 God, O God!
 God, O God!
 God, O God!"

ROSMINI'S TEACHING ON PIETY AND THE INTERIOR LIFE

The Benedictine Motto, "*Ora et Labora*", expresses the essential activities of the contemplative life. Holy solitude must be filled with an intense life of prayer:

"The mystic union of that Society, by which JESUS has brought together for the sake of their salvation all those who believe in Him, is such that a secret and truly divine plan enables each to share in the merits of all who are united to the Head. Hence there is no work of piety towards God which cannot be rightly numbered amongst works of charity towards our neighbour" (C578).

The reality of the mystical body of Christ means that the prayers that rise to God from places of contemplation benefit all the members of the body. The Church has always valued contemplative Orders as "power-houses" for the whole world through their constant and faithful prayers. In the elective state our members can dedicate themselves more readily to prayer bringing graces and blessings to the Institute and to the whole of humanity. The example of St. Therese of Lisieux, a contemplative nun, doctor of the Church and patron saint of missionaries, should be sufficient to reassure people in the contemplative life that their life of intense prayer is valued as greatly beneficial to all.

In the *Commentary to the introduction to the Gospel of St. John* Rosmini goes as far as to write, "***Christianity is first and foremost piety***", since the essence of Christianity consists in the union and incorporation of the human creature with God; and in this consists also the principle of piety – which is first of all and fundamentally the experience and feeling of Christ. In the Five Wounds, Rosmini claimed that Christianity spread rapidly and peacefully throughout the world not because it was based on a

philosophy or on preaching only; it converted the whole world because of the power of Christian worship and the communication of the power of Christ Himself through the Sacraments.

In Baptism we receive the character and sanctifying grace, the Word of God in our soul through the power of the Spirit whereby we become in Christ the “*image of God*”. By the impression of the Word on our soul we become a new creature, we are raised to the supernatural level with a new intellect, a new will, and a new fundamental feeling that allow us to perceive the action of God in us. Of all these new supernatural principles God is both the cause and the effect: God operates in us and His actions terminate in God. Our human intellect, will, feeling are taken up and raised to new supernatural heights by the action of God in our soul, an action which Rosmini calls “*deitriiform*”.

Christianity is based therefore on a **supernatural feeling** that originates from direct communion with Christ:

“Experiential mystical theology is concerned with actual communication with God, an interior revelation, the effect of

His real action on man, made up of feelings and perceptions which make God known directly through experience, immediately, by means of a communication of His own substance made in us. This experience tells the man of God that a single such perception is of greater value than all the words, the disputes, the Schools, and the libraries of the world. His knowledge of God is in the nature of a fact, a positive cognition – something complete, satisfying and operative” (Intro, p193).

This is the reason for the priority of the contemplative or elective state in the Institute, “*the diligent preserving of holy solitude in which, as far as human frailty allows, we attend to God intensively and without interruption*” (C488). This is the reason for the priority of prayer in the Institute. It is interesting to note that the first duty and responsibility of Fr. General is “*uninterrupted prayer*”; the general government of the Institute must take second place to this.

The priority of prayer must go together with a **constant effort to purify oneself** from all vices and sinful longings. The Common Rules also remind us that “*the chief and most solid work of piety consists in striving by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ to carry out more perfectly day by day all that is required of us by our state or grade, so as to join our lives ever more closely to God our Lord*” (no.11). If piety is intimate union with Christ, then anything that brings about this union is an act of piety: prayer, meditation, purification of our soul, doing perfectly the will of God through the duties that obedience has given us.

Rosmini stresses the need for a **full understanding of prayers**, especially the liturgical prayers of the Church. In the Five Wounds he laments the poor participation of both lay people and priests in worship due to lack of understanding of words and rituals: “*It is necessary that the people understand what is said and done in the holy sacrifice, in the administration of the sacraments, and in all church services. The separation between people and clergy at worship through lack of comprehension is the first of those gaping wounds dripping with blood in the mystical Body of JESUS Christ*”

(Five Wounds, p.12).

“The eternal Lord, who is pure intelligence, sets no value on mere “sound and fury”. What He looks for is the worship of our rational faculties and the affections of our heart: our “rationale obsequium”. And so He can take no pleasure in prayers and invocations that are merely so in outward form, a mere husk, that altogether lack soul and life, that are dead. Such prayers, far from sending up an agreeable odour of incense, rather smell to heaven like the putrid stench of a corpse”.

Rosmini is for **simplicity in prayer**. He does not recommend lengthy, complicated formulas and devotions; rather, he thinks our souls can find their total rest in the great liturgical acts of worship of the Church and in the simple, **spontaneous personal prayers** like the Rosary – with its repetition of the Our Father and the Hail Mary - and devotional aspirations or “ejaculatory prayers” which are brief, and intense, prayers for the needs of the Church, of all our neighbours, of the Institute, and of our own personal needs.

The liturgy is “the great school of the Christian people”, which, in

the finest periods of the Church's history, taught the faithful through words and rituals, mainly in the Eucharistic Sacrifice and the other Sacraments:

“Liturgical prayer, which is the prayer of the Church, and has a precise foundation in theology, must always remain fundamental and have first place. Through Baptism the Christian becomes a living member of the Church, and at the same time becomes a sharer in her liturgical power, in the priesthood proper to the faithful”.

The Eucharist, the supreme expression of Christ's love, “justice at its most perfect”, is at the centre of piety and it should always be at the centre of community life, the source from which all good things come. What is typically “Rosminian” is the stress on the “blessing” of bread and wine, which represent all things in the universe and the universe itself. Mass, therefore, is seen as a cosmic event even from this angle.

“It will be a special point of devotion to see that the blessing of the Eucharistic bread be extended to everything the Christian uses in this world. In this way, all things will be considered consecrated to divine worship, and God, who

is honoured in all things, will cherish and bless those who adore Him in spirit and in truth” (C497).

Rosmini said that our Institute could be called the “**Institute of Blessing**”, because, through the Eucharist, we desire “*all persons and things to be blessed*”. This blessing of everything in the universe through the daily Eucharist should provide a solid foundation for a theology of ecological issues, very important today given the strong emphasis on the environment and all related problems.

Devotion to the Precious Blood of JESUS remained constant in the life of Rosmini, since the time he received from Magdalen of Canossa a booklet of meditations and prayers to the Precious Blood. The booklet was on the cabinet beside his bed at the moment of his death on the Feast of the Precious Blood.

In the Constitutions, Rosmini recommended the “**offering of our blood**” in union with the Blood of JESUS our Redeemer, saying that “*it is an act of piety for which we shall have a special love*” (C762). This offering should be made frequently, during Mass, “*with humility, fear, and trembling*”, especially by

presbyters and major superiors, but also by all other members of the Institute.

Rosmini's *devotion to Mary*, especially Our Lady of Sorrows, is well documented. He was looking forward to writing a special book on Mary in his *Supernatural Anthropology*. Writing to Fr. Paolo Barola, he says, "*The last book of a work I am at present engaged on will deal with our blessed Lady. Oh, what a consolation it will be to me if by my labour I succeed in arriving that far! I rejoice to think of it. Pray for me to our dear Mother that she may obtain this favour for me and give me light to write worthily of her*".

His faith lead him to believe that it was a sign of Providence his being born on 24th March: "*God, when He granted me the grace of being born on the vigil of the feast of our Lady's Annunciation, showed that He meant to give her as Mother and Protectress, and this I have always experienced*".

Rosmini recited daily the *Rosary*, which, after Mass, he considered his most pressing duty of the day. In difficult times, he looked up to Mary for help and protection: "*I have a complete faith after God in our beloved Mother and Leader – Mary; and I entrust to*

her also this whole business, and remain entirely tranquil in myself. The whole Institute is her child; let us leave our Mother to act. Meanwhile I can tell you that she every day grants me new favours and new consolations".



THE SPIRITUALITY OF BLESSED ROSMINI

CHAPTER 2

LOVE FOR THE CHURCH

(2nd Maxim)

LOVE FOR THE CHURCH

(2nd Maxim)

The very first fruit of holiness is a great love for the Church. Our desire to please God means that we love all that God loves; and God loves His Son, and His Son loves his Immaculate Bride, the Church, “*the faithful who form His kingdom*”.

We can never be mistaken in choosing the Church as the object of our love, thoughts, desires, and actions; this is precisely the Will of God.

We need to distinguish, however, between that which is essential and that which is transitory and contingent.

The universal Church of Jesus, the instrument and means through which God is glorified, the Bride of Christ, is the “sublime society” which **must be loved unconditionally and wholeheartedly**. We ought to be ready to wear ourselves out in her service, and to shed our blood for her, after the example of Jesus and the martyrs.

The single unessential parts of the great body of the Church, however, must not be loved as ends but as means to increase the glory and beauty of the Church. The Institute of Charity, for example, **must not be loved as an end, but as a means**; and equally any other religious Order. They have their origin in God, and their purpose is to work and toil for the Church; but God, who raised them up today, may well cause them to disappear tomorrow.

Our love for the Church must extend to embrace the **triumphant Church** in Heaven, the **suffering Church** in Purgatory, and the **militant Church** on earth: all three parts make up the Immaculate Bride of Christ.

The Church on earth is founded on a rock St. Peter and his successors, the bishops of Rome, and supreme Vicars of Jesus. The Holy See, by the will of the Founder, Jesus, can never fail

and is therefore the essential part of the Church. The Christian, therefore, must cultivate an *“unbounded love, devotion and respect for the Holy See of the Bishop of Rome. He must set no limits to his love for this essential part of the Church”*.

The Christian must love the Church in heaven, admire her beauty, and stir up in his heart an urgent desire that all members of the Church reach this ultimate perfection. **He must pray for the coming of the Kingdom**, and desire that this world dominated by suffering and death should come to an end.

He will live, therefore, always in a state of readiness to depart, without making long-term plans, but remembering Jesus' words, *“Let your loins be girded and your lamps burning, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect”*.

ROSMINI'S LOVE FOR THE CHURCH

Rosmini's love for the Church was as great as his love for Christ, immense, without limits. The Church was the great, beautiful, sure, and divine object that filled his heart; in all his writings one can find at some point a description of the

magnificent work of God in the Church and through the Church. The Church is Christ, with all the faithful being one with Him, hence his constant application since his early years to make Christ the object of his thoughts, love, and actions. To live *“in Christ”*, to acquire the *“mind of Christ”*, to *“put on Christ”* was his constant endeavour; and for the Church, the mystical Body of Christ, he was prepared to work and to toil till the *“shedding”* of his blood.

The Church, founded on the unchangeable love of God for mankind, will never end; having Christ as the Head, will never go astray, or fail in the aims God has set for her through the centuries. She is the only institution that will continue for all eternity, the perfectly free Society of God and mankind, the model for all other human associations.

Rosmini modelled the Institute of Charity on the Church, and created for the Institute a mighty direct link to the essence of the Church by the *“fourth vow”*, that the *“presbyters”* of the Institute make, of perfect obedience to the Pope. The presbyters, thus, whose task it is to preside over the unity of the brethren, are the guarantors of the perfect harmony and unbreakable bond with the Church.

But, Rosmini said, “*the Institute is not to be loved for itself, but in it the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ... Let us always think of the Church of Christ, not of this Society*”. The Institute is merely a means willed by God for His purposes; it will continue, it may even expand, but only until it serves the divine plan. The Church, instead, is our Mother and must be loved as end, with all our strength:

“With the rest of the faithful we have the gospel of Christ as our great common codex. We must use it day and night. Our Constitutions, taken from the gospel, must lead us back to it. Hence the members of this Society should not set themselves apart from other people, but rather unite with all in the one body of Christ”

Rosmini called the Institute of Charity, “*the tiny army of the Lord*”, forming, together with other religious Orders, an orderly force at the service of the Church, moving together in obedience to the commands of the Head, Christ:

“By the word of the Lord they pitched their tents; and at His command they took them down; by the word of the Lord they marched: and kept the watches

of the Lord according to his command by the hand of Moses” (Num. 9,23).

The Fathers of the Church saw the Exodus from the slavery in Egypt through the barren desert to the Promised Land as a figure of the journey of the Church, rescued from the power of the devil by the saving death of JESUS, lead by the sure and mighty hand of God through the arid desert of this human life, to the promised land of Heaven.

“Look at the great numbers and marvellous order of the people of God! Six hundred thousand warriors, three million faithful distributed in twelve camps, all living in thousands of tents, yet arranged with wonderful symmetry in an immense desert. They travel, they rest, their soldiers are drawn up, they fight and conquer as one man. What a sight it is! What order! What irresistible power!”

Rosmini compared the many religious orders to a “*well-ordered*” army within the Church, forming the camps of the Lord, and marching at His commands:

“The Fathers also tell us that the Israelites, chosen by God as his very own people, were more

exactly an image of religious life – the many coloured robes, as it were, of the Bride of Christ, one in nature but divided into its various congregations”.

Many holy men and women, inspired by God, applied themselves exclusively to a single work of charity and founded congregations for that very purpose. Rosmini mentioned Camillus de Lellis (spiritual assistance of the sick and dying), John of God (corporal assistance), Peter Nolasco, Raymond of Penafort, Felix de Valois (redemption of prisoners). He added, *“In fact, almost every religious community has chosen to fulfil some heroic work of charity”.*

The Institute of Charity, on the other hand, has no special work of charity: *“These saints had special enlightenment from the Lord, enlightenment and stimuli not given to our Institute which cannot therefore predetermine the works of Christian charity to which the Lord may destine it. For the same reason, it cannot exclude any work... The Institute’s special perfection consists in its lack of any special perfection. Its sole desire is that God’s grace renders it excellent and even sublime in the perfection of charity set before all*

the disciples of the Redeemer”.

It is easy to understand Rosmini’s immense suffering at the condemnation of two of his works by the Church, both born out of the immense love for the Church. He had written them with the honour, prestige, greatness of the Church in mind, resolutely trying to proclaim to the world the infinite worth of the Church of Jesus Christ. It is also easy to understand his burning disappointment at knowing that those attacking his work for the Church were the very ones who were meant to be marching together in defence of the Church.

THE FIVE WOUNDS OF THE CHURCH

It is not possible to examine in detail this testimony of Rosmini’s great love for the Church. What follows are simple notes aimed at presenting some of the more general points:

1. It is undoubtedly the most famous of Rosmini’s books, written with great passion and love for the Church. It caused him immense personal damage, but he felt that the renewal of the Church was of such great urgency that he

- had to be prepared to suffer for it. Rosmini borrowed the image of the “*crucified Church*” from Pope Innocent IV (1243-1254).
2. Rosmini wrote it in 1832, but did not publish it, “*the time did not seem ripe*”. In 1846, a new Pope was elected, Pius IX “*who seems destined to renew our age and give the Church the impetus for a new, glorious stage of unimaginable development*”: Rosmini published it in 1848 for a circle of friends “*who have shared my sorrow, and now look forward with me in hope*”. It was issued immediately in other editions, against Rosmini’s wishes, by pirate publishing houses. It had a swift and wide diffusion. There was also an English edition of the book published in London, translated by an Anglican canon.
 3. With hindsight we can say that the publication of the book in 1848 was a great mistake, given the agitated political situation in most of Europe. It was bound to raise fierce opposition from all quarters, but especially from the Austrian Government. Austria, who was occupying most of North Italy, viewed Rosmini as “*our most formidable enemy*” and “*the evil genie of Pius IX*” (from a letter of the Austrian Ambassador in Rome, 1849). Rosmini was a subject of the Austrian Empire (Rovereto was under Austria at that time), but he did not hide his strong desire for the independence of Italy as a confederation of free Italian states. Moreover, in the Five Wounds, Rosmini called for full freedom of the Church in all rightful things, but especially in the appointment of bishops, and in the full ownership of all Church’s properties. Austria, on the contrary, exercised at the time an absolute control over the appointment of bishops in the Austrian Empire, and the clergy and the properties of the Church were dependent on its authority.
 4. But why were 1848-1849 the worst years for the publication and diffusion of the Five Wounds of holy Church?
 5. Rosmini had been sent to Rome as a special envoy of the king of Piedmont, Carlo Alberto, with the task of persuading the Pope to agree to a concordat and to accept to be the head of a Confederation of free Italian States. The Pope, who had

Rosmini in the greatest esteem, welcomed him and told him to get ready to be made a Cardinal. Everybody at the curia was sure that Rosmini would have been made the next Secretary of State. Unfortunately, the political situation in Rome deteriorated, with the assassination of the Prime minister of the Papal States and a popular uprising. Priests and some Cardinals were killed, and the Pope was forced to flee Rome in disguise. He made his way to the kingdom of Naples and he remained at Gaeta for over a year under the protection of the king of Naples and of the Austrian Government. He asked Rosmini to follow him to Gaeta, and initially he relied heavily on Rosmini for advice. Things changed drastically for Rosmini with the arrival of the Austrian ambassador, “*welcomed like a Messiah*”. The Pope was easily persuaded that the safety and security of the Pope and of the papal States was with the traditional protectors, Austria, Naples and any other Power that opposed movements of independence or of liberalisation. The Pope told Rosmini

that he was no longer a “constitutionalist”, and that he had abandoned all his liberal views. Moreover, Rosmini found almost impossible to approach the Pope, and the Cardinals, led by Cardinal Antonelli, a staunch supporter of Austria, made sure that Rosmini had no influence on the Pope. And indeed, they used the Five Wounds as a powerful tool against Rosmini.

6. Rosmini was asked by the Pope, under pressure from some of the Cardinals, to clarify his teaching on the following suspected opinions found in the Five Wounds: 1) The divine right of clergy and people in the election of bishops; 2) The use of the vernacular in the Liturgy; 3) Criticism of Scholasticism; 4) The separation of Church and State. Rosmini clarified all points and sent a written paper to the Pope. He sent a second letter, but to no avail: people at the papal court made sure that no letter from Rosmini reached the Pope. Soon afterwards, the police of the kingdom of Naples began harassing Rosmini with the clear intent to have him out of the kingdom and in no position of influencing the Pope.

7. Rosmini left Naples on 15th July 1849. As he was making his way towards Stresa, on 13th August 1849 he received the letter from the Congregation of the Index which stated that on the order of the Pope the Congregation had met (in May-June, when Rosmini was in Naples, but the meetings had been kept secret from him) and had decreed that the book *“Of the Five Wounds of Holy Church”* had been condemned and placed in the Index of forbidden books. The Pope had approved the decree and asked for submission. Rosmini submitted at once, *“I had been kept in the dark about the meetings of the Congregation and I was never told the reasons for the condemnation. I sent my full submission... Sit nomen Domini benedictum”*. He wrote in his letter of submission: *“As a devoted and obedient son of the Holy See, which through the grace of God I have always been in my heart and publicly professed to be, I declare that I submit to the prohibition of this book, absolutely, simply, and as completely as possible, begging you to inform the Holy Father and the Sacred Congregation”*. A few days later he wrote to the Master of the Sacred Palace: *“I will add that by the grace of God alone, I have never in my life had a temptation against the faith, nor have I ever hesitated a moment to condemn anything that the Holy See might find wrong in my writings or elsewhere”*.
8. No official reason for the condemnation was ever given. Rosmini was assured that nothing wrong theologically had been found in the book; his own view was that the book had been condemned because of the pressure of Austria on account of his insistence that the elections of bishops are no matter for the State but for the Church and that clergy and people have a divine right to elect their bishops, with the approval and final say of the Pope.
9. The book was taken out of the Index just a few years before Vatican II. It was widely known to the Bishops who took part in Vatican II, and many of the ideas of the book found their way in the Vatican II Documents. Pope Paul VI called the Five Wounds of Holy Church *“a prophetic book”*. It is the opinion of many that some of the Wounds are still waiting

for a cure, and we may need perhaps a Vatican III to tackle more resolutely the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Wounds; and even the First and Second Wounds are still very much open, although the Church of Vatican II has produced important documents towards “*healing*” them.

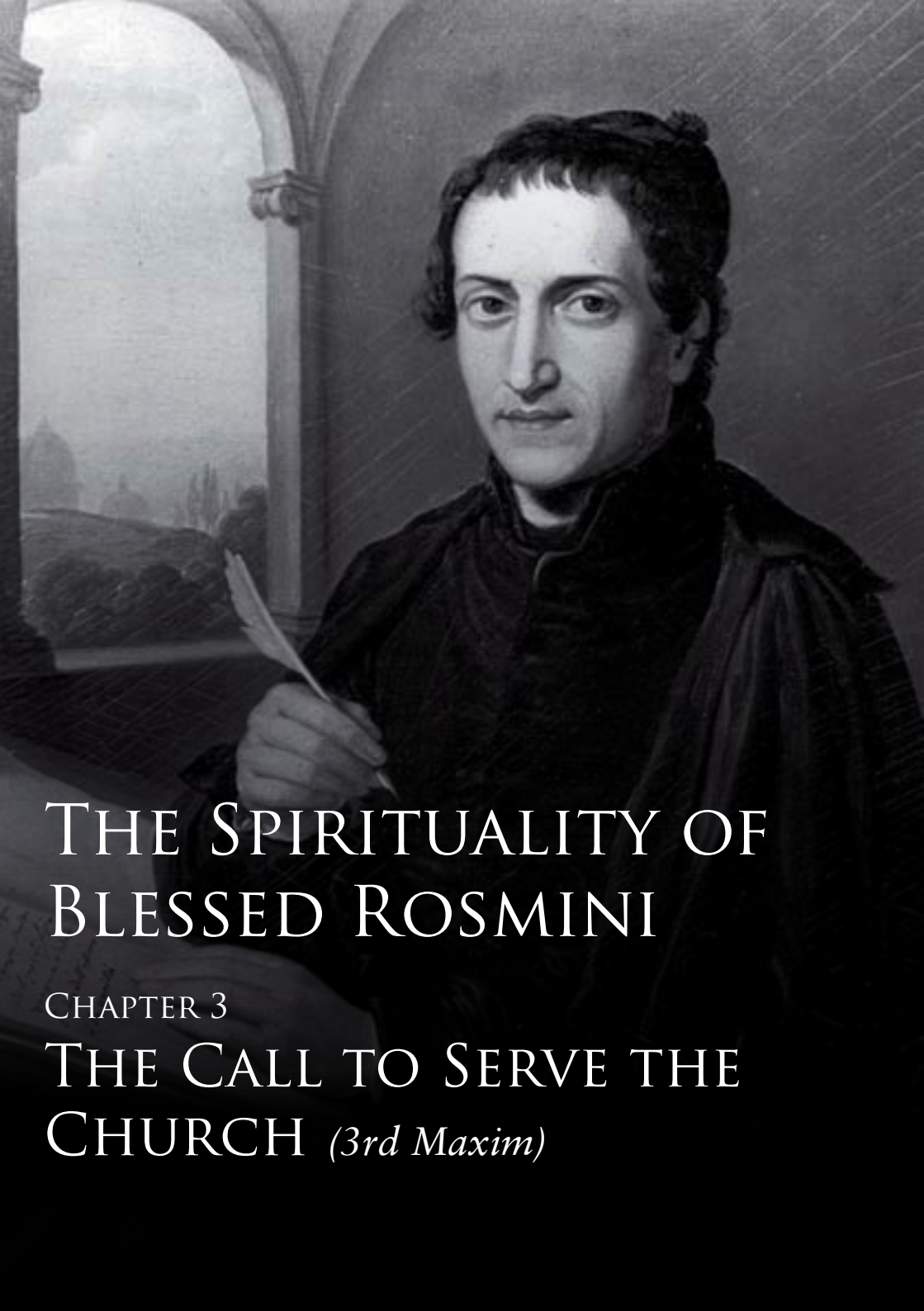
10. The Five Wounds of Holy Church is a precious theological book on the Church that Rosmini loved with all his heart. Here are some important points which have been taken up by Vatican II and subsequent Papal Documents:
- The living union of clergy and laity in the one People of God.
 - The active and intelligent participation of all to the Liturgy
 - Christianity as a “supernatural” reality and mystery.
 - The centrality of Scriptures and of the Sacraments.
 - The return to ancient traditions and to the Fathers of the Church.
 - The necessity of a living theology.
 - The profound education of the clergy, on Scripture, Fathers, Traditions.
 - The collegiality of the bishops with the Pope at

the Head.

- The renewed awareness amongst Christians of the Bishop as Father and Shepherd of the local Church.
- The presence and the consent of the People of God (clergy and laity) in the election of their Shepherd, the Bishop.
- The responsibility of the whole People of God for the Church.
- The freedom of the Church from political powers and earthly riches.
- The real poverty of bishop and clergy, chosen as a vocation.
- The work of charity of the Church for the poor to whom the riches of the Church partly belong.

THE FIVE WOUNDS:

1. The division between people and clergy at worship
2. The insufficient education of the clergy
3. Disunion amongst the Bishops
4. The nomination of Bishops in the hands of civil government
5. The enslavement of Church’s goods (by the State and by the lack of poverty of the members of the Church)



THE SPIRITUALITY OF BLESSED ROSMINI

CHAPTER 3

THE CALL TO SERVE THE CHURCH *(3rd Maxim)*

Jesus alone is the Lord of all things, in heaven and on earth. He alone directs all events with wisdom, power, and goodness according to His divine Will, for the benefit of his Bride, the Church.

The Christian, therefore, should never be over anxious about the well being of the Church, since Christ is ruler of all things. He should remain in perfect tranquillity, and be full of joy, even when circumstances or people appear to go against the Church. He should pray and implore the Father that His kingdom may soon be established, and that His Will may be done on earth as it is in heaven.

The Christian should banish from his heart the illusion that he may be of use to the Church by his own means, without expressly being called by God, who does not need the help of anyone to bring about the greater glory of the Church.

The call to serve must come from the Lord; we must wait in silence and in hope, doing what we know already to be the Will of God for us: the purification of our soul, the pursuit of the virtues, the closest union with God.

If by the mercy of God we are called to do some specific work for the benefit of the Church, we should remember that God often chooses what is weakest and most contemptible in the eyes of the world.

ROSMINI AND THE CALL TO SERVE THE CHURCH

The “young” Rosmini had immersed himself in a flurry of activities for the good of the Church. He had an immense desire to help the people of his time discover the greatness and beauty of God, and, full of zeal, he felt, confusedly at first, a call to urge them by a variety of means to embrace God and his Church.

The damage caused by the French Encyclopaedia with its attacks on God, on the Church, on Christianity prompted him to react by founding the Society of Friends; and many other activities were started with the one purpose of bringing people back to God.

After the Ordination, Rosmini experienced a spiritual enlightenment which brought him to his ascetical “principle of passivity”. He already had a most profound understanding that

God was in charge of everything, directing all events, and that the Church was safe in His hands; but now he felt he had to draw the consequences of this certainty, and it was that he ought to remain in perfect tranquillity with regards to all that happens to the Church, and concentrate on what he knew for certain God wanted of him: the purification of his soul, and holiness of life.

The call to serve the Church came a little later, through St. Magdalene of Canossa, Fr. Loewenbruck, Popes Pius VIII, Gregory XVI, Pius IX. It was to work for the Church by founding the Institute of Charity and the Sisters of Providence, and to engage in the restoration of Catholic philosophy and theology, by writings books, to “take people by means of reason and lead them to God”.

Through the dramatic events of 1848-1849, Rosmini’s main concern was to follow closely the will of God: the Roman mission, the preparation for the cardinalate, the flight to Gaeta to be with the Pope, and the final departure from there in apparent disgrace, all was done after the most careful consideration about the Will of God, in faithful obedience to His call.

THE GRACE OF OUR SAVIOUR

To understand Rosmini’s principle of passivity, which is the foundation of his spiritual charism, it is important to have clear why in the supernatural world we are indeed “unable to do any thing good” without the grace of our Saviour.

Grace is the perception of God in the depths of our soul, a perception which is real not merely ideal. In the order of nature, man can only have a negative idea of God with the light of reason alone. Rosmini argued strongly against Pelagianism – the view that original sin caused only the privation of grace leaving intact all human faculties – and Protestantism – the view that original sin caused a complete corruption of all human faculties, incapable, therefore, even to establish the existence of God. Rosmini shared the traditional catholic doctrine that original sin not only deprived human beings of grace but also corrupted their nature, but not so radically as not to be able to bring man to the knowledge that God exists and that He has infinite qualities such as goodness and justice.

A person born blind can only have a negative idea of light and colours; different arguments may allow him to know that they exist and even that they must have certain characteristics. Without direct experience, however, he will never be able to have a positive idea of light and colours. It is the same with our knowledge of God based simply on reason: we know that He exists, and we can draw a variety of consequences pertaining to Him, but since we have no positive or direct experience of Him – we do not perceive Him, we do not see Him “face to face” – then we cannot say anything “positively” about Him.

This is where “grace” comes to our aid. The “character” and the “sanctifying grace” given at Baptism as an entirely free gift from God allow us to “perceive” God who “acts” really in our soul. God acts in us directly, creating in us a new “fundamental feeling”- feeling of the supernatural - superior to the other two “fundamental feelings” – feeling of our body and feeling of the idea of being enlightening our intellect – which we have since our natural birth. God, through grace, creates in us a new being, more precisely, completes and raises to perfection our human soul in way not possible

to unaided human nature.

Grace operates in the intellectual essence of our soul because “the supreme being can communicate with what is most noble in the human being”. This action, even though is produced in the intellectual essence of the soul, is not “ideal” but “real”: the distance between what is ideal (purely based on ideas) and what is real (based on feeling) is immense. The operation of grace is real, not merely ideal: Rosmini gives as examples of this difference the “law of Moses” (purely ideal, incapable therefore of operating any change in human beings) and “the grace” of Christ, a real action operated by God in our soul and capable of drawing it to Himself.

We can say therefore that:

- through the action of grace God almighty Himself produces a real immanent action on the intellectual essence of the soul, uniting Himself to the soul;
- the soul, touched by divine grace, is elevated to a supernatural condition;
- both potencies of the human soul, the intellect (passive) and the will (active) are raised to a new supernatural level – a real creation;
- the supernatural will of the

soul produces its effect through faith, which is always present, at least in a germinal way, in every soul touched by grace.

Rosmini calls grace a “deiform operation”. God performs many operations, like creation and the government of all created things. These operations begin in God and terminate in something different from God. These operations are obviously divine, yet they are not “deiform”. Rosmini defines a “deiform” operation as “an operation which not only has God for its principle, but the operation itself and its term is God”. He is the cause and the effect:

“I define a deiform operation as that which not only has God for its principle, but God is also the operation itself or its term. God is the principle and the term or end of grace; He is the cause and the effect. The Incarnation of the Word is the pre-eminent “deiform” operation” (Supernatural Anthropology, Vol.1, p.113)

In the soul touched by grace there is not only a divine effect but there God Himself. God is therefore not only the “efficient cause” – producing various effects in our soul – but is the “objective formal cause” – that

is, God is the cause and the effect at the same time of what is happening in the soul, without in any way becoming our soul.

The unity of the Divine Nature was the basis of the Jewish revelation and that of the evangelical revelation is the Trinity in which knowledge given by God to man has been completed. So it is clear that the grace which sanctified man before the coming of Christ may properly be called “deiform”, the title of “deitriform” grace being reserved for the grace of the Redeemer. The grace of the Old Testament manifested itself in man by a divine power which made the law of God superior to all other things in his heart, and by a feeling of expectation, a feeling of hope which promised him the possession of the “totality of being” and gave him a certain pledge of that possession.

God unites Himself to us formally through grace. But God subsists in three Persons, hence, since the time of the revelation of the Trinity by JESUS, the three Persons of the Trinity unite themselves formally to the just person. The Christian therefore through grace experiences the Holy Trinity, though in an imperfect way in this life.

Though the feeling of the Trinity is indistinct it is a force acting in us and which fills us perfectly and satisfies and contents us completely so that we feel “all being”, “all good”. The feeling of this totality has three forms or modes: a feeling of infinite power and force that acts in us, a feeling of truth – a subsistent truth which illuminates – and a feeling of diffusing love. We experience therefore the real action of the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity, the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit.

Rosmini defines the “character” that we receive at Baptism as the “seal” of the Word of God in our soul operated by the Holy Spirit. We become the “image” of God, not because anything “created” can ever be the “image” of God – this is impossible – but because by the power of the Holy Spirit the “true and only image of the Father”, that is the Son, the Word of God, is impressed in our soul. It is the Son in us that is the “image” of God: the character is the “seal” of the Son in our soul, a seal which is indelible and which raises the soul to its supernatural state.

It is from the baptismal character that sanctifying grace springs up, enabling us to do what pleases God thus becoming holy. Grace may indeed be lost if we resist the Spirit, but the baptismal

character, or our generation to supernatural life, cannot be lost:

“St Paul, speaking about the baptismal character says, “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Ep. 4,30). What does it mean to say – do not grieve the Holy Spirit – if not that we may indeed lose sanctifying grace by means of sin? Thus it is clear that the Holy Spirit gives us both the “seal” or character and the sanctifying grace” (Supernatural Anthropology, p.233)

We could go into far more accurate and extensive details about the treatment of divine grace in Rosmini’s eminent books, “Supernatural Anthropology” and “Introduction to the gospel of St. John”: but what has been written is sufficient to give us an idea of the fundamental importance of grace in our Christian and religious life.

Human beings, by themselves, cannot do anything in the supernatural order, that is, they cannot do anything which can make them holy, pleasing to God. This is what JESUS meant when He said, “Without Me you have no power whatsoever to do anything”. The good in us is brought about by grace, by

the living presence of the Trinity that operate in a real way in the essence of our soul.

This awareness brings humility and complete reliance in God. JESUS is the vine, we are the branches: “Abide in Me, and I in you”, this is grace that produces abundant fruits.

In the Constitutions, Rosmini deals with grace by stating beforehand that in the order of nature everything is geared towards achieving the greatest glory of God: whether willingly or unwillingly, “the children of this world co-operate with God’s plan” (C469).

In the supernatural order, however, “*mankind can do nothing without the grace of God and our Saviour JESUS. The creature’s work, study, planning, his efforts, the burdens he takes upon himself, are useless; there is nothing he can do of his own power, even though he possess every natural gift and the whole world besides, which would leave him with the slightest capacity for acting on the supernatural level*” (C470).

If man desires to do actions that produce his own sanctification or the sanctification of others “*he must first humble himself by careful consideration of God’s*

free choice, and pray. All other graces will come through this grace of prayer” (C470).

The members of the Institute, therefore, who as children of the light want to pursue holiness must surrender themselves entirely to the grace of God, and let God work in them: “*Their confidence will be in the power of God which uses persons and things alike, making them suitable in His hand for every work*” (C472).

Rosmini backs up his words with a long quotation taken from his favourite passage from St. John’s gospel, chapter 15, 1-16, the passage that presents the image of the vine and the branches, with which we are already familiar.

JUSTICE, OUR YES TO DIVINE GRACE

“*As a person without eyes cannot see, so human beings can do nothing towards eternal life unless the grace of our Lord and Saviour JESUS Christ works in them*” (C473)

This free gift must be received with infinite love and gratitude, and with fear and trembling lest after receiving it we lose it. Our response to God’s grace is, therefore, to co-operate fully

taking great care to correct our spirit through continual purification.

Everyone in the Institute is aware of the immense importance of the word “justice” in Rosminian spirituality, yet some may find it difficult to explain precisely what Rosmini means by this word.

We may begin by saying that justice has three aspects that involve our constant and simultaneous attention:

1. Justice is “abstaining from sin”, is a life-long struggle to remove from our lives whatever resists God’s holiness, is a constant process of purification. Under this aspect justice is purity, limpidity of heart, innocence of life, is putting truth at the centre of our heart and mind. Justice is to have a heart which is free from sin: pride, mendacity, passions, selfishness. In the Introduction to The Rule of Life we read Fr. Founder’s personal engagement in obtaining for himself this innocence of life, this “justice”: *“I, Antonio Rosmini Serbati, most unworthy priest, set before myself a rule of life consisting of the following two principles, 1- To think seriously of amending myself of my enormous vices and of purifying my soul of the evil which has burdened it since my*

birth, without looking for other occupations or enterprises for the benefit of my neighbour. I realised that of myself I was absolutely incapable of doing anything for my neighbour’s benefit. 2- Not to refuse the works of charity towards my neighbour which divine Providence may offer or bring to my notice (God is able to make use of anyone, even me, for his work), and in this case to be completely indifferent towards all works of charity, doing what is offered to me as willingly as any other work, as far as my free will is concerned”. The Common Rules present a similar preoccupation with achieving “justice”: *“The salvation of our souls is reached through justice, that is, abstaining from sin. This justice is the foundation of the whole Society. Each member, then, should humbly make constant and persevering efforts, wholly relying on the grace of God, to purify his conscience more and more day by day”* (Common Rule 3).

2. Justice is to know and to acknowledge the order of being, giving what is due to everyone and everything. This is God’s justice in the first place, since He is absolute real Being, the creator of all that is. God, Absolute Being, is Love and God loves all that He has created, according

to the order of creation. Justice is communicated to us by God himself. In other words, *“through the grace of God in JESUS we can see and appreciate all-that-is as God sees and appreciates it. Faith, enlivened by grace, enables us to act towards all-that-is with the reverence and love found in God Himself. It is our participation in God’s justice that moves us to love God with all our heart and our neighbour as ourselves”* (D. Cleary in A Society of Love, p.110). Justice in this sense compels us to give God the adoration, obedience and love which are due to Him as our Creator, our sovereign Lord and Master, our infinite benefactor and heavenly Father; and to give to ourselves and to all creatures whatever God has ordained to be due to us and them. Living in the truth, we are bound to seek to please God in everything we do, by doing His Will: *“Since it is justice that makes us dear to God, Christians must constantly pray to grow in justice and goodness... The more they ask this from God, the more they please Him. They will be reassured by Christ’s own words: blessed are those who hunger and thirst after justice for they shall have their fill (Mt 5,6). In Christian life and worship, everything must be centred on the single desire of becoming*

more and more just, and on an unceasing, limitless, infinite plea for this justice... Upon this justice, obtained through His prayer, Christ has founded the Church of the elect which cannot perish...” (Maxims, 1st Maxim).

3. Justice is Calvary, the hill of blood. Calvary is the “sublime altar” empurpled by the precious Blood flowing from the veins of Christ satisfying the Father’s eternal justice and bringing salvation to all. Calvary is a place of shame, but it was there that the sin of the world was taken away by the sacrifice of love of the Lamb of God. Jews and Gentiles, says Paul in Romans, have sinned and are in need of the mercy of God: *“Both Jews and pagans sinned and forfeited God’s glory, and both are justified through the free gift of his grace by being redeemed in Christ JESUS who was appointed by God to be a “hilasterion” through faith by His Blood”* (Rom.3, 24). The Cross of JESUS became the “mercy seat” (hilasterion=the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies in the Temple, sprinkled on the Day of Atonement with the blood of a lamb as a reparation for the sins of the people) sprinkled with His Blood and which brings true salvation to the human race for all times. Calvary, therefore,

is the hill of “justice”: the hill where all sins were taken away by the Blood of the Son of God, the hill that manifested the infinite love of God for us – “*God did not spare His only Son, but gave Him up to benefit us all*” (Rom. 8,32) -, the hill from which all the means of salvation have come to us. From the open side of Christ, the new Adam, the Church came forth and with the Church, the two sacraments, baptism and the Eucharist, represented by the water and blood: “*Blessed is the wood by which justice comes*” (Wisdom 14,7).

Rosmini insists on the first meaning of the word justice, that is, abstinence from sin. No one can escape the fact that he is a sinner in God’s eyes: “*He that is holy, let him be sanctified still*” (Rev. 22,11); “*If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us*” (1 John 1, 8-10).

We must, therefore, endeavour to purify ourselves from every stain day by day. Two are the means recommended by Rosmini:

1. Disclosure of conscience, with complete candour and truth, to a spiritual Father.
2. Firm desire to amend oneself together with patience and tenacity

But there are also two opposing excesses to be avoided:

1. Excessive rigour and scrupulosity which is often the result of presumption, of thinking that perfect purity and “even impeccability” can be achieved;

2. Laxity of conscience, which is even worse, because it allows many vices to remain in our consciences undisturbed. We may feel easily satisfied by some good work we do and we think that the all merciful God will save us in any case. The idea that God is only merciful is tempting to many souls who say to themselves, “*It does not matter what we do, God in His mercy will save us at the end*”. Fr. Founder repeats the words that St. Bridget was told by JESUS: “*The foundation of the Church is faith, namely belief that I am a just and merciful judge. But now this foundation has been undermined. They all believe and preach that I am merciful, but practically no one preaches or believes that I judge*”

justly. They almost consider me a wicked judge, for the judge who would free evil persons without punishment so that they could oppress the just would indeed be wicked. But I am a just and merciful judge; the least sin does not remain unpunished, nor the smallest good un-rewarded” (C478).

THE LOVE OF GOD

God is the end of everything, He alone is to be loved in all things since everything comes from Him, the source of love: *“We are not obliged to serve the glory and greatness of any person, but give help and service from our hearts to all, not for the sake of flesh and blood, but for love of the one God who alone is lovable and worthy of honour”* (C481).

Christians, “the children of the heavenly Jerusalem”, must direct all their love to God the Father and to his Son JESUS. All other things must be loved for the sake of God, not in themselves: *“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey His commandments”* (1 John 5,2).

The love of God is, therefore, the *“single source of all the cares and labours to which the members of this Society are dedicated”*

(C483).

We need to deepen the meaning of the words Rosmini says in the Constitutions about the love of God. One way of doing this is to study carefully what he says in his homily on “Charity” (p.44-85, a very long homily indeed!).

He begins by saying that “Christ’s charity is simply justice at its most perfect”: this applies to the love of Christ for us, and to the love we have for Christ. But to love someone is to do his will in all things: *“In the lover, the special proper object of love is simply the will of the beloved”*, hence loving God means doing His will in all things.

But, what does the divine will want? *“All it wants from us – what a marvel this is – is love itself”*, expressed in the two commandments of love of God and of neighbour. However, how can mortal, finite creatures ever hope to be able to respond to God’s infinite, eternal love? How can contingent beings ever hope to be able to match their own weak and limited will to the eternal, almighty Will of God? Isn’t the distance too great, impossible to fill?

Rosmini answers these questions by saying that the distance can indeed be filled, that our love

and will can raise themselves up to the Almighty by means of JESUS Christ. It is JESUS who does the loving in us, it is JESUS who does the Will of the Father in us: *“Christ in us is our charity... Christ in us is the great lover”* (p.47, 49). It is Christ in us, therefore, that makes it possible for us to love God and to do His Will. We have learned from the letter to the Romans that the Holy Spirit prays in us on our behalf: *“For when we cannot choose words in order to pray properly, the Spirit himself expresses our plea in a way that could never be put into words”* (Rom. 8, 26); we need to understand now how the Son loves in us.

The answer lies in the “seal”, the “character” impressed upon us in Baptism, and given even more depth in Confirmation, and Holy Orders:

“The sublime Word, God from God the Father, the figure of His substance (Heb 1, 3), through His everlasting mercy, impresses Himself upon our souls. He does this through the Sacraments which He, JESUS Christ, has instituted in His love for the sake of uniting and binding to Himself all other human beings” (p.48). The seal is, therefore, JESUS Himself, the perfect image of

the Father: this is the profound reason for the assertion in Genesis that man was created in the image of God. The true image of God can only be His Son, and at baptism the Holy Spirit impresses that image deep within our souls:

“This is the reason why many fathers of the Church teach that the image of God in man is given by the Holy Spirit, because it is the Holy Spirit that gives the character which He impresses in the soul by communicating the Word of God, the Son” (Supernatural Anthropology, p. 303).

The Holy Spirit, therefore, gives to the soul the divine Word, who becomes united to the soul by being impressed in it with a permanent seal.

“Because the indelible character left upon our souls in the sacraments is our Lord JESUS Christ himself, the brightness of God’s glory and the figure of his substance, so Christ is the great lover in all of us. He is our power of love. Love is Christ’s very own Spirit diffused in our souls” (p.49)

“What a wonder this is! Almighty God, as charity subsistent in us, is our charity! Charity in God,

therefore, and charity in us, is one. It is of equal nature, of equal grandeur and of equal infinity. It is always Almighty God in himself and in us” (p.57)

“For charity to be in the world, it was necessary for God to come into the world because “God is charity”. Charity came into the world in JESUS Christ. When charity was in the world, the world could share in it: “And of His fullness we have all received” (Jn 1,16).

The love of God has been said by St. Paul to have four infinite qualities: breadth, length, height, and depth; qualities which we should also imitate.

The first characteristic is the breadth of charity: it enfolds everyone, the saints in heaven, the souls in purgatory, and all the members of the militant church on earth. But it embraces also our “enemies”: “Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you. That you may children of your Father in heaven...”: Christ gives us His Father as teacher of charity; He gives us Almighty God, who is charity, as the example for all our actions. Our charity, therefore, must be as universal as the charity of God; must be marked

by generosity and care for all. Charity must go beyond self, family, country: the true follower of JESUS is the sign of concord and peace, of meekness and humility, recognising in everyone the one God who is love.

Charity is also long and unbounded. God loves of an everlasting love: He has always loved, and He will always love. The length of charity is the constancy with which God-charity loves, who has loved all his works ab aeterno. This love has never allowed itself to be conquered by human waywardness of any kind, on the contrary, He paid our infamous debt with His own blood. We too must imitate the duration, longanimity, constancy of the love of God: we must never cease loving, never tire of doing good, never to abandon the good works we have begun, never allow the sacred fire to be extinguished.

Just as charity embraces all human beings and things through its breadth, and extends to eternity through its length, so through its end it rises to a height which has no limit, since the end of charity is God Himself who loves in us. All our desires, actions, endeavours have God as their end: the one necessary thing in our life is to love God with

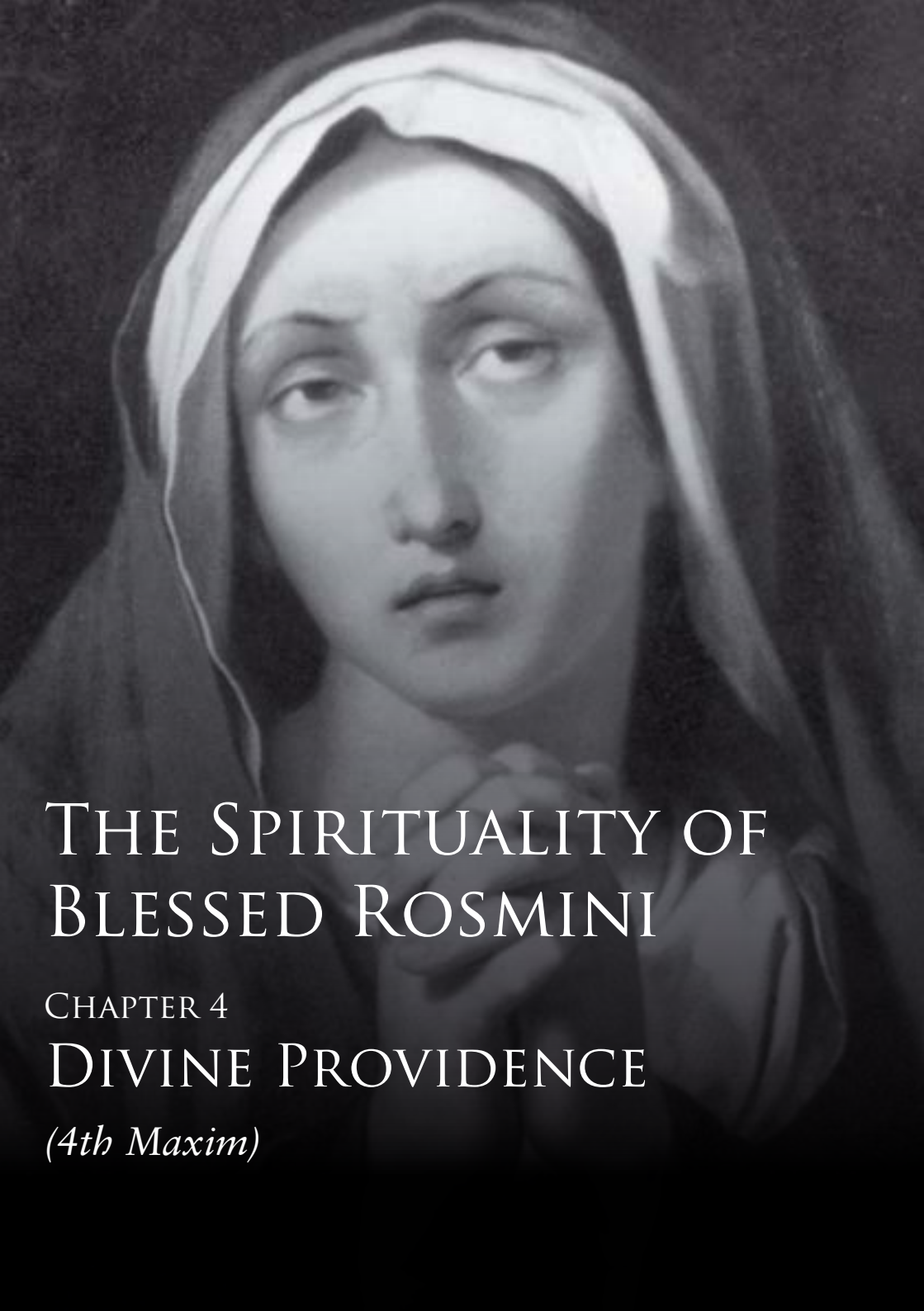
all our mind, heart, strength, so that God may be “all in all”. The whole universe is a manifestation of the love of God and is progressing, notwithstanding moral and natural evil permitted by the infinite Wisdom of God, to the fullness of the glorious kingdom of His Son. Charity reaches its height only when it is well-ordered and leads our actions to the eternal salvation of souls, the end of the universe. It is the height of charity that urges us to embrace all kinds of work for our brethren: temporal, intellectual, spiritual charity has the only purpose of saving our soul and the souls of people.

The limitless height of charity requires as its indispensable condition an unlimited depth of humiliation, and of sacrifice, which follows on humility. Anyone who is not humble without limit is unsuitable for the grandeur of charity. Pride is ignorant of charity. The humiliation of the Son of God brought charity to the humble: *“Being in the form of God, He thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men. He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death...”* (Phil. 2, 6-8).

We also must be prepared to “lay down our life” for our brethren, to sacrifice ourselves for the others. Love is as strong as death and perfect charity is tied up to martyrdom.

Fr. Founder ends his homily by quoting from St. Thomas Aquinas who has left a very moving picture of the four dimensions of charity:

“Under the impulse of charity, Christ chose the death of the Cross in which we find the four dimensions we have mentioned. For the breadth, look at the crossbeam to which His hands were nailed; our works too must stretch out even to our enemies. For the length, look at the upright from which hangs his body; charity must persevere and save mankind. For the height, look at the wood higher up where his head rests; our hopes must rise to eternal, divine matters. For the depth, look at that section of the wood buried in the earth and invisibly upholding the cross; the depth of divine love incomprehensible to us because the reason for predestination exceeds our understanding upholds us”.



THE SPIRITUALITY OF BLESSED ROSMINI

CHAPTER 4

DIVINE PROVIDENCE

(4th Maxim)

Divine Providence had a special place in the heart and mind of Rosmini. His two principles of conduct – passivity and indifference – sprang directly from complete trust in Divine Providence, the “polar star” in his spiritual firmament, always shining from on high, a visible sign of the eternal and infinite love of God for all His creatures.

His masterpiece on Providence is “Theodicy”, in which he shows the constant love and infinite wisdom of God in the government of the universe, always drawing the greatest possible good from his creation. The book presents the eternal and supreme wisdom and power of God far beyond anything we mortals can understand, and the extremely limited and finite powers and means of all creatures.

This infinite distance, however, is filled by the eternal and ever-present love of God for all that He has made, shown by the Providential laws that guide with a mighty hand all world events and people to a blessed and sure end.

The fourth Maxim, however, is the best starting point for a deep meditation on Divine Providence: “*To abandon oneself entirely*

to divine Providence”. Rosmini begins by saying that “*there is perhaps no other maxim which helps more than this to obtain the peace of heart and stability of mind proper to the life of the Christian*”.

All things in the world, both great and small, rest alike in God’s mighty hand, and nothing happens except as He disposes. God turns everything to the good of those who love Him, for it is His sovereign will to bring forth from our lives and from the entire creation the richest possible harvest for our everlasting joy. Therefore in all circumstances we entrust ourselves to Him with child-like simplicity, confident that the more we do so, the more pleasing we become in His eyes and the more abundantly He blesses us: “*Adore, Be silent, Rejoice*”.

This maxim was recommended by our Saviour by His words and example.

“Do not be afraid, you are of more value than many sparrows... Do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body... Consider the ravens... Consider the lilies... Your Father knows what you need... Strive for His kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well...”

The words of JESUS on the loving care of Divine Providence can be expressed in **seven teachings**:

1. JESUS Himself, who did not refuse the name “*friend*” even to Judas, is the foundation of the Christian’s total and unbounded trust.
2. In the same way that it is reasonable to abandon oneself entirely to divine Providence, so it is foolish to trust in oneself, since we are utterly weak, and incapable of changing in the least the course marked out by God for everything in the universe.
3. Trust in God brings the freedom to abandon all human things for the sake of the kingdom and to “*fasten oneself to the bare wood of His holy cross, dying to the world and living for heaven alone*”, in a state of effective poverty.
4. We are forbidden to be anxious, to worry, but not to ask the Heavenly Father for what we need, as long as we do so only after asking for His kingdom and his justice. We are invited by JESUS to ask all things to our heavenly Father with great simplicity and trust, opening to Him all the desires of our heart. God will always answer our prayers – correcting our ignorance and lack of understanding – and giving us “*good things*”, never things that are harmful.
5. We are forbidden to be anxious and restless, but not to enjoy the things we have “*with simplicity of heart and gratitude*” because they have been given by God. But we must not feel any disquiet about future things, or things we do not have: “*Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own*”.
6. Since the perfection of the Christian life is to please God in all things, it follows that in everything we do in our ordinary daily life, in the enjoyment and the sorrow we encounter, our only aim must be to be pleasing to God. From this stability of heart like from a spring of clear water issues the principle of passivity, that is, the principle that we must remain “*contented and joyful*”, **without looking for change, without worrying about altering our circumstances in life unless we have a sure**

indication of God's will.

7. **Trust in Providence alone is also the source of the second principle, of indifference,** which is that *“we will be equally willing and content to make a change when the will of God is made known. This golden state of indifference causes us not only to serve God in all things, but to serve Him in the way in which He wants to be served”*. So the true disciple will often examine himself to see whether he really *“is indifferent to poverty or riches, honour or contempt, health or sickness, a long or a short life”*.

These seven teachings on divine Providence are the foundation of Christian and religious life for individual members. In the Constitutions, Providence is presented from the perspective of the *“foundation of the entire Society”*. The points Rosmini makes within this perspective are the following:

- The Institute depends on and is guided solely by Divine Providence.
- The presumption that may drive some members to place their confidence in the organisation and greatness of the Institute considering

it necessary to the Church of Christ, is entirely misguided and wrong. It is a grave danger.

- Fear and anxiety about the Institute's well being and increase is equally wrong since the entire Institute depends upon the Providence of the heavenly Father, not upon human planning. Moreover, the Institute is not to be loved for itself, but in it the Church of JESUS.
- The Church of JESUS is the everlasting Kingdom and our hearts and minds must be burning with inextinguishable zeal for it. The Institute will be kept into existence by the Father in Heaven only as a mean amongst many others and only for the duration that He has established for it.
- *“Let us always think therefore of the Church of Christ, not of this Society”*; the Institute, willed by God, guided by God through Superiors bound up most intimately to the Church, must be loved by us *“so long as it is useful to the Church”*.



THE SPIRITUALITY OF BLESSED ROSMINI

CHAPTER 5

ACKNOWLEDGE OUR
NOTHINGNESS *(5th Maxim)*

The disciple of JESUS should be “*always*” in a state of interior solitude, in the presence of God whom he should worship and adore, feeling his own weakness and nothingness before the divine greatness and majesty.

It is not difficult to be persuaded of our nothingness considering the limitations of all created things, including man “*a mere atom in comparison with the universe*”, and our own weakness.

God is the source of all good, hence we, by ourselves, are incapable of doing anything good. This fact should dissuade us from undertaking anything unless we are “*called*” by God, who will give us what we need to fulfil His Will.

We are caught, therefore, between two conflicting tendencies: we should have an “*immense zeal*” for God’s glory and the good of our neighbour, while, at the same time, knowing that we are incapable of doing any good and powerless to remedy the evils that exist in the world.

The disciple should imitate the humility of Moses who was full of zeal for the salvation of his people, and yet he found it hard to believe that the Lord had chosen him to lead them into the freedom of the

promised land.

Moreover, the disciple should imitate the most humble and the most perfect of all creatures, the Blessed Virgin Mary. Her hidden life with God was declared by Him to be the “*most virtuous and most magnanimous of all lives*”, and He raised “this humble and unknown young woman” to the highest dignity of all and “*to a throne of glory above any given to men or angels*”.

Like Mary, the Christian ought to pursue a life of solitude, humble adoration, silence, and constant occupation, without wasting a minute of time. Time is a most precious gift, and we shall have to give a strict account of the way we use it.

ROSMINI AND THE “PRINCIPLE OF PASSIVITY”

All purely human efforts, all human initiatives are simply powerless in achieving salvation for ourselves or for others. This is the conviction that should constitute the launching pad for utter trust and reliance in JESUS alone, this is the origin of the principle of passivity that makes us acknowledge our nothingness and at the same time the primacy

of God in our life: *“Of yourselves you can do nothing, but with Me you will bear fruit in plenty”*. Notice the paradox: of yourselves nothing, with Me all things! Our passivity in Christ issues in unbelievable dynamism and power: *“He will perform the same works as I do myself, he will **perform even greater works**”*, says JESUS of the disciple.

Rosmini formulated this rich theological realities brought about by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit into the two principles which constitute not only his own personal spirituality but the essential spirit of the Institute of Charity as well. Drawn from the depths of the New Covenant theology the principles take us back to the gospels of JESUS Christ. The two principles are most clearly stated in a document entitled “Rule of Conduct”, written by Fr. Founder on the occasion of his entry into the Novitiate in November 1830, in which he gives an account of the basic principles of his spirituality and of the way in which the Institute grew out of them.

“I, Antonio Rosmini-Serbati, unworthy priest, had resolved to follow a rule of conduct consisting in the following two principles: 1- To attend seriously

to the task of correcting my enormous vices and of purifying my soul of the iniquity that had weighed upon it from my birth, without going in search of other occupations or undertakings for the benefit of my neighbour, finding myself quite impotent to do anything of myself to his advantage; 2- Never to turn down works of charity towards my neighbour, when divine Providence should offer and present them to me, for God has the power to use anyone and even myself for his works: in such cases I would maintain a perfect indifference in regard to all works of charity, doing the one proposed to me with the same enthusiasm as I would any other, at least as far as my free will was concerned...” (Rule of Conduct)

The Maxim speaks about the “two conflicting tendencies” in the heart of the disciple of Christ: zeal for his neighbour, and profound awareness of our nothingness. The disciple will choose the “contemplative” life, waiting for the Lord to manifest His Will. But this “elective” period must be lived fully. This is what Rosmini wrote to Fr. Rigler in 1832, explaining both “passivity” and “indifference”:

“We must always remember that our state of contemplation must

never be a state of inactivity, but a state of preparation, a state in which we build up enthusiasm, generosity and grace to be ready and fervent in the work to which the Lord may call us. We must remain in hiding like the lion in his den; we must live at home in contemplation like bows stretched taut, like spumante ready to spurt forth, like a pressurised force that will expand and explode with all the more impact when the moment arrives. It is necessary for all of us to have a good understanding of this elective state of ours. But since man is limited, it is better to tell the young religious one thing at the time and first get them to appreciate the inestimable value of a hidden and retired life committed to meditation and prayer: and then, perhaps at the first occasion when the charity that constrains us calls us to active service, is the time to explain the other part of the teaching...”

In the Constitutions, Rosmini explains how members of the Institute may find themselves successively in two different states, the first – the **elective state** – dedicated to contemplation and divine worship, the second – the **active state** – dedicated to works of charity for our neighbours.

The elective state comes logically first, it is “*chosen*” for its own sake and for the sake of doing the will of God, and not our own, in the works of charity that will be presented to us “*as time goes by*”. We choose the elective state for at least two reasons:

1. **The light of reason**, which is the truth that enlightens our minds, makes it clear that God, the author of all things, is to be sought at all times as the absolute Good and the sole end of all things. The contemplative life allows us to dedicate all our thoughts, desires, and energy in seeking union with God.
2. **Our LORD Himself recommended the contemplative life**, not only by giving us His own example of 30 years of hidden life in Nazareth, but also by saying to Martha, “*One thing is needful; Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her*” (Lk 10, 42).

It would be a mistake, however, to hold that the Institute is essentially contemplative and that it undertakes works of charity only because driven by circumstances.

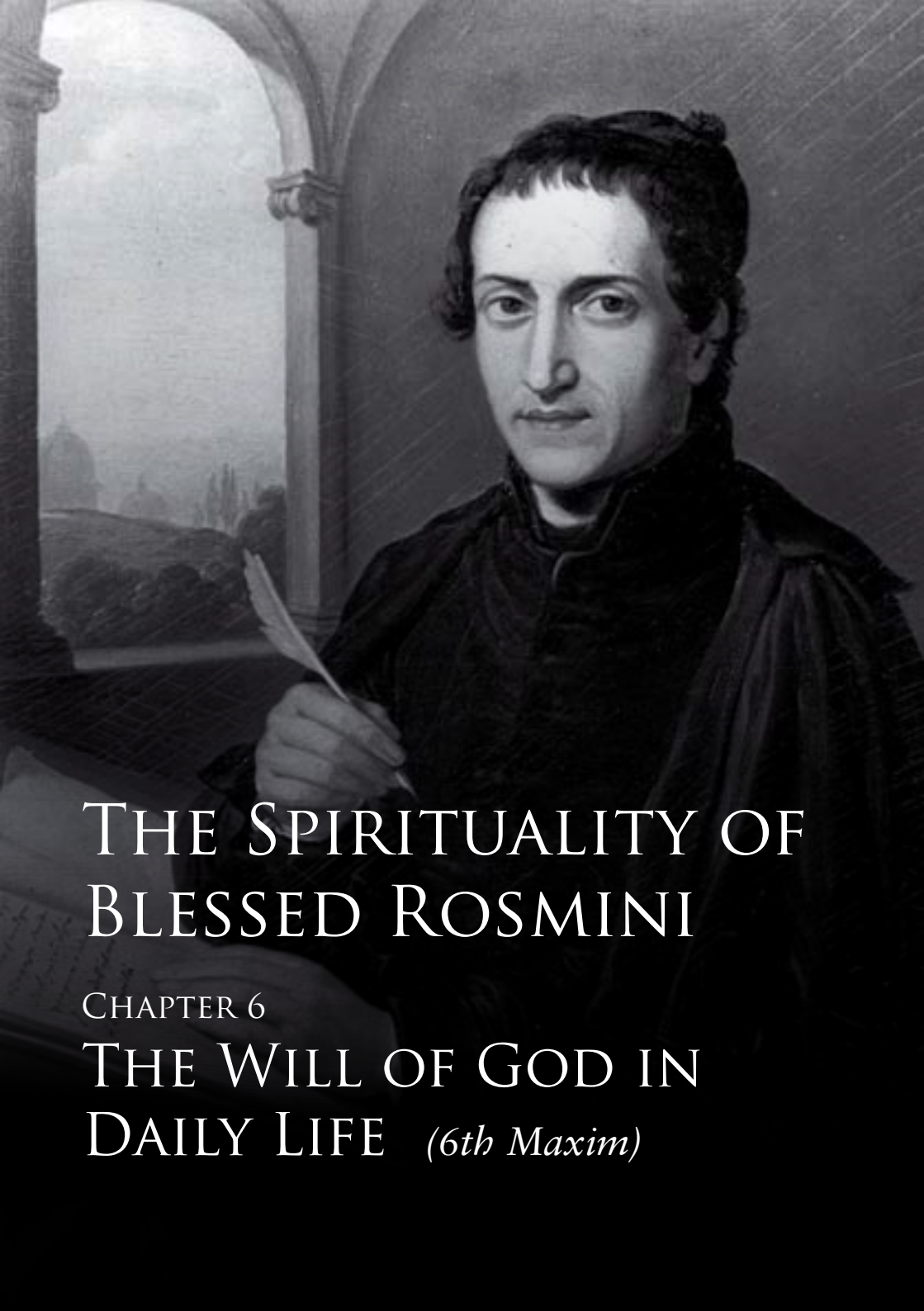
The theological reasons for the “*elective*” state are the Principles of Passivity and of Indifference, based on the biblical theology of the New Covenant. Rosmini discovered both principles by living them first, making them his two rules of conduct; he then made them the foundation of the Maxims, and of the Constitutions. They are his essential charism, firmly rooted in biblical theology. It is certain that these principles express the charism of Antonio Rosmini and the essential nature of the Institute of Charity.

Both principles are explained in all their theological implications in Rosmini’ Supernatural Anthropology and Introduction to the Gospel of St. John. Fundamental for a proper understanding is the Rosminian distinction between “*natural*” and “*supernatural*”, “*natural*” denoting all that man is and does in virtue of his own faculties, and “*supernatural*” what he begins to be and do when God – through the character and grace of Baptism – becomes the inner source of his activity. “*Natural*” man can do absolutely nothing for his own salvation and perfection; he is utterly impotent: “*Without Me you cannot do anything*” and “*No one can come*

to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him”.

Acknowledgement of one’s impotence, the basis of true humility, forces one to direct all attention and trust in God: God in us can accomplish the greatest things: “*I can do all things in Him who gives me strength*”; “*Without Me you are impotent; with Me you will bear much fruit: you will perform the same works as I do myself, and greater ones still*”.

The contemplative state, therefore, is a time when we take stock of our incapability of doing by ourselves any good whatsoever and allow God to act fully in us, knowing that with Him we can do any thing. We are at rest, at peace, working earnestly, driven by His grace, on the purification of our soul so as to become more and more pleasing to God, and prepared at the same time to spring into action for love of our neighbour if, when, and where God wants us to engage in the active life. We immerse ourselves in contemplative life as if we are going to die in it; but, at the same time, we remain completely open and ready to follow the will of God in the active life as soon as the Lord indicates it to us through obedience.



THE SPIRITUALITY OF BLESSED ROSMINI

CHAPTER 6

THE WILL OF GOD IN DAILY LIFE *(6th Maxim)*

THE WILL OF GOD IN DAILY LIFE *(6th Maxim)*

The Christian should never walk in darkness but always in the light. The Holy Spirit will grant him His gifts of understanding, wisdom, knowledge, and counsel that will allow him to conduct himself always “*thoughtfully, maturely, and with prudence*”.

The “*spirit of intelligence*” will guide him to work on correcting and perfecting himself before thinking of correcting and perfecting others.

It is the Will of God that guides the disciple to perfection. This Will is easily recognised in the circumstances in which one is placed, and which must be lived fully according to the following principles:

- Holiness is to fulfil one’s duties faithfully, exactly, and promptly.
- The disciple must deal with the people around him with great love, respect, kindness, and gentleness.
- He will love hard work, without wasting time, and applying himself with diligence, and maturity, and for the glory of God.

- He will serve God in whatever occupation God has placed him, whether in the academic life or in manual or technical work. Since the only thing that counts is the greater glory of God, any work willed by Him will be embraced wholeheartedly.

The perfect fulfilment of the duties of our state, including all religious obligations, is what God demands of us in the first place. All other time at our disposal ought to be spent in constant prayer and “*spiritual reading*”. Prayer, in particular, should be our constant preoccupation, raising our minds to God even as we go about our routine work. It is a great privilege to be allowed this familiarity with God and to converse directly with Him.

The “*spirit of intelligence*” should also guide us in discovering the Will of God in relation to our holy desire to help our neighbour. God’s Will is manifested through external circumstances, like seeing people in need, or being asked

for some charitable service; our response must, then, be generous, courageous, loving to the point of self-sacrifice, in imitation of the love that JESUS manifested for us, to the point of shedding His Blood on the cross.

The Christian will always choose the hidden life, withdrawn from the dangers of the world, immersed in prayer, meditation, and hard and humble work; but he must be prepared to be called by God to an “*active*” life of service to his neighbour. In this case, he will respond with all the generosity of his heart, not sparing himself in any way, prepared to undertake great things, most difficult and dangerous tasks, for the love and glory of God.

But there is “*order*” in charity therefore the Christian will follow three rules:

- 1- When asked to do a work of charity he will do it, no matter whether it is difficult, great or small, pleasant or disagreeable; he should not refuse it under the pretext of uncertain calls in the future;
- 2- Should he be asked to choose among various works, he will select according to order, and to his own abilities;

- 3- He will bring to completion the work, even if tiring or difficult or unpleasant; he will consider it as the Will of God for him.

The infallible rule for knowing whether we are doing the Will of God is the “*peace and tranquillity which the Christian experiences deep down in his conscience*”. Should we act for other motives, our conscience will soon be troubled by restlessness and disquiet.

ROSMINI AND THE “SPIRIT OF INTELLIGENCE”

Intelligence for Rosmini is constituted by the constant vision of the idea of being, the light that comes from God and leads us to God. It is not surprising therefore, that perfection is to do all things with a “*spirit of intelligence*”. We find the same stress in the Constitutions:

“Our life will be perfect when we do all things according to the light of reason. Our actions must depend upon the indications and necessity offered by reason itself, not upon caprice. We must remain at rest, therefore, until moved by reason”.

Rosmini’s use of time is one of the most striking external features

of his life. His phenomenal literary output numbers more than 100 volumes on every aspect of philosophy and theology, and the collection of his letters runs to 13 volumes of about 700 pages each. By necessity a great traveller in northern and central Italy, he also founded two religious Congregations, was endlessly engaged in the great questions of the day, carried out his spiritual duties as priest and as director of hundreds of souls, and was noted for his hospitality.

His total obedience to the Will of God, even when difficult and physically demanding, was evident when he accepted with great reluctance to take over the parish at Rovereto in 1835. He dedicated himself to the pastoral work with great zeal and enthusiasm, and gave it up only when it became clear that due to the restrictions imposed on him by the Austrian authorities he could no longer perform his duties as required by charity. Obedience led him to Rome in 1848 and he persevered, notwithstanding persecutions and obstacles.

At the same time, he found refuge gladly whenever God called him to the quiet of the contemplative life, at Calvario in 1828, and at Stresa from 1849 until his death in 1855.

The constant peace and tranquillity of soul, attested abundantly by the people who were close to him, transpired from all his letters and, in particular, from the lofty words of his *Commentary on the Introduction to the Gospel of St. John*, written during the most agitated, painful, trying period of his life, the last months of the Roman Mission.

(FOOTNOTES)

¹ See p.63

² The one idea of being is the source of all other ideas, of all knowledge

³ Books on Rosmini useful for consultation are: C Leatham, Rosmini, New City Press; U Muratore, Conoscere Rosmini, Vita Trentina Editrice; A Valle, Antonio Rosmini, Durham; D Cleary, Antonio Rosmini, Durham; the translated works of Rosmini, Rosmini House Durham; J Morris, The Ascetical Letters of Antonio Rosmini, available from Rosmini House Durham.

⁴ The thesis dealt with the pagan prophecies about the coming of Jesus

⁵ It should be clear that it was not the Company of Jesus involved in the attacks, but few individuals belonging to it. In effect, many Jesuits had shown great esteem for Rosmini.





Sacro Monte Calvario, Novitiate House



Sacra di San Michele, near Turin



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