

A PAINTING TELLS US A STORY

SISTER ANNA ANTIDA CASOLINO

We can easily think of a painting portraying Saint Jeanne Antide kneeling before Pope Pious VII thanking him for the approbation of the Institute and its Rule and asking for his blessing before returning to France.

On 12th September 1818 (LD 328), Jeanne Antide addressed the Pope asking for the pontifical approbation of her work with these words:

as “your very humble and very obedient daughter in J.C., Sister Jeanne Antide Thouret, being for a long time animated with the most ardent desire to receive from Heaven the great happiness of coming in person to the feet of Your Holiness to kiss them and to receive your blessing as well for all my companions, the Sisters of Charity called “of Besançon” established in France, Switzerland, Savoy and Naples [...]. Most Holy Father, I come also with the greatest confidence to the feet of Your Holiness to fulfil the sacred duty imposed on me of offering for examination and for the approbation of Your Holiness the book of our rules and constitutions which we all follow. Will Your Holiness accept it, and grant us the great grace of the precious approbation of Your Holiness, in the name and for the glory and love of Christ for the love of the poor, the edification of good Christians and the great consolation and encouragement of all the members of our Community? (LD 328-329).

The Pope granted the approbation on 23rd July 1819 (LD 331). Jeanne Antide remained in Rome from November 1818 to April 1820. During this time she worked at the revision and re-printing of the Rule. However, due to the obstacles opposed by the French clergy she turned again to the Pope who granted a second document: the Brief, on 14th December 1819 which confirmed the previous statement:

“After this new scrutiny and renewed discussions held in a specially convened assembly on the 16th June of the same year 1819, their Eminences, jointly with the Secretary of the Sacred Congregation, after a new and mature examination of the Constitutions and Rules of the Daughters of Charity under the Rule of St. Vincent-de-Paul agreed that they should be approved not only for the cismontane Provinces but universally; the approval shall imply several modifications which do not affect their substance and which were presented on separate sheets of paper; these should be submitted to the Secretary and to the Holy Father for the approval of the Institute, its Constitutions and Rules: the presentation of this Institute, its Rules and Constitutions was made to Our Holy Father, Pope Pius VII by the undersigned Secretary of the Congregation at the audience of 23rd July or the same year 1819. His Holiness was happy to approve the Institute of the Daughters of Charity under the protection of St Vincent-de-Paul, with all its Rules and Constitutions¹.

¹ This text is missing in the LD's English version

More than two centuries have gone by, and we are now considering the go-ahead granted by the Church after the revision of the Rule. The General Council reminded us of it in 2017 at the Special Chapter held to read once again and ratify the Rule.

Sister Christine, General Councillor, following the mandate of the Superior General and of the other Councillors, worked at the presentation of all the Rules edited from the origin of the Institute up to our days, in the various languages used within the Congregation. Above the texts of the Rule displayed in the Chapel, there was the painting shown at the opening of today's conference, and portraying Jeanne Antide presenting the Rule to Pope Pious the VII.

The painting, a likely representation of Jeanne Antide and a second Sister (probably Sr. Rosalie) meeting the Pope and the Cardinals, is usually situated in the Library of the General Curia.

The Sisters belonging to the religious province of Rome have always had the chance of admiring this painting for the subject represented as well as for its artistic beauty and colours. It used to be displayed in the "red hall", so called for the colour of its furniture and carpets, reserved to religious and civil authorities visiting.

Sister Christine prepared also an interesting display, placed next to the Chapter Hall, with pictures and objects related to people, places, texts, images and documents.

The contemplation of the painting inside the chapel during a touching celebration with the Chapter Sisters raised the interest and the questions of many among them. Asked about its provenance I immediately thought of another painting, almost identical for size and picture. In fact, I had noticed a very similar painting at the Institute Saint Jeanne Antide in Rome, the current venue of the Euro-Mediterranean Province. From this, came the idea of comparing the two paintings and see what connection there could be between them.

Therefore, I went there and in one of the so called "parlour" I observed for the first time that on the right side at the bottom the name G. Cingolani could be read, followed by a date not well visible because it was covered by the important frame of the painting. By taking some pictures with my mobile I was able to identify the year 1880, and thought of doing further research later on. Back into my office at the General House I searched on the web information about Cingolani, and I found out that Giovanni Cingolani was a well-known artist, so much so that he was called "painter of the two worlds". Besides, I discovered that at Montecassiano (province of Macerata) where he was born there is a museum which bears his name, and among the works listed I saw a painting like the one belonging to us, yet with a different caption: "*Confirmation of Saint Sperandea's rule*". Who was this woman? I wondered. Thus, in a new research I discovered that she lived in the Middle Ages, her uniform was very different from ours and we never had any connection with her. Therefore, I concluded that there had been a mistake, and became even more determined to discover how and why this painting came into our possession.

Then, I contacted the office for the Cultural Heritage of Montecassiano causing their surprise and raising their curiosity. They requested a picture of our painting with the details of the signature and the date, because they have got experts able to verify its authenticity.

I sent everything they requested, wishing to continue as soon as possible such research.

When Sister Christine suggested that the conference hold in October could be on this curious topic I immediately accepted! Thus, I took up again my research and renewed the contact with the Montecassiano's office.

While reading articles about Cingolani a second name kept coming up: Mons. Nazzareno Marzolini. We will dedicate our attention to him later on, first we shall take a close look at Giovanni Cingolani.

GIOVANNI CINGOLANI

was born at Montecassiano (Macerata) in 1859, and died in Santa Fe in 1932. He was a painter and restorer between the nineteenth and the twentieth century, he worked in Italy, at the Vatican and in Argentina. He painted religious subjects and portraits - the best known is that of Pope Leo XIII – he worked at the restoration of the Sistine chapel and other works in the Vatican City up to the year 1909, contributing to the restoration of some of the major frescoes of the Italian Renaissance, such as the Borgia Apartments, Raffaello's rooms, the Niccolina chapel at the Vatican Library, he also took part in the maintenance works of the Sistine chapel's vault.

Cingolani was then called to be part of the team of Ludovico Seitz, who from 1887 was Inspector of the Vatican's paintings and from 1894 was the artistic director of the Vatican Pinacoteca.

He, then, migrated to Latin America where he continued his artistic work, that is why he is remembered as the painter of two worlds. At Montecassiano some of his works are displayed in a Gallery, situated at Palazzo dei Priori.

We are more interested in his activity in Rome, where he came in 1880 after leaving many remarkable works in Perugia. In those days Rome was particularly attractive for artists who had had an academic formation and who found there the opportunity of studying the Renaissance's masters as well as the most prestigious sculptures.

Cingolani was helped by friends and compatriots like the medallist Luciano Bizzarri from Macerata, and especially the painter Pasquale Frenguelli from Perugia, custodian of the Lateran museum. The latter helped Cingolani in setting up his own studio at the Lateran.

Frenguelli and another man from Perugia, Nazzareno Marzolini, who would later become the secret chaplain and Master of ceremonies of Leo XIII (1878-1903), introduced Cingolani to the Vatican circles and to the Pope, who before becoming the Pontiff had been Bishop of Perugia for more than 30 years.

The Pope entrusted to Cingolani his official portraits and religious paintings which he sent also abroad, as it happened for the canvas portraying Saint Leo destined to Constantinople.

Due to the good quality of his works in 1930 Cingolani became a member of the Academy of fine arts in Perugia.

In 1909 left everything and went to Argentina, where he was acknowledged as one of the best painters of that time. At Santa Fe he started the University of Arts and Sciences.

Cingolani's activity influenced the art production at Santa Fe. He was among the first foreign painters who were there, when in the first decade of the XX century the first Academies started. An artist like him who had worked at Raffaello's rooms, or at the Borgia's Apartment, had contributed to the restoration of the "Universal Judgment" by Michelangelo, had portrayed Pope Leo XIII, had illustrated masterpieces like the "Liberation of Jerusalem" written by Torquato Tasso, or the frescoes inside the Churches of Carpineto Romano (birth place of Leo XIII) and of Pollenza, was certainly an enrichment for Santa Fe's arts. He formed generations of young artists about painting on walls, the art of restoring and decorating, thus providing, with new and rigorous order both religious and civil buildings.

No doubt Cingolani's work was formidable, he was brilliant or as the critics say he was "enlightened". With the zeal of his enlightenment he worked strenuously on scaffoldings or before canvasses, representing themes and hagiographies. I like to think of him while painting the canvas in our possession.

NAZZARENO MARZOLINI

He was born in Perugia on 4th September 1844 and died in Rome on 18th January 1917. He was Secretary of Perugia's Bishop and then he was called to Rome in 1878 by the then Leo XIII as secret chaplain, Pontifical Master of ceremonies and, later on, as general manager of finances at the Vatican. He was confirmed in this office by Pious X who appointed him also as secretary at the Administration of the goods of the Holy See and of Peter's pence.

At the archive of the General house are kept the journals reporting all the events and visitors of the house and among them many refer to Mons. Nazzareno Marzolini.

We do not know yet why he was in touch with the Congregation or if he used to stay at the General House on a regular basis, certainly besides his offices at the Vatican he was able to do also various services for the benefit of our religious family.

He was related also to Cingolani whom he helped when he was the secretary of the Bishop in Perugia.

In my research I read the journals related to the years 1898, 1899, 1900, 1901 close to the date found on the painting, hoping to find the request of the painting whose realization I guessed could have come from an idea of Marzolini who asked his friend to paint it or else could have been requested from the Superior General or even from the Pope himself, whom also personally knew Cingolani.

Besides, in 1899 Mons. Marzolini was already the Postulator for the cause of beatification and canonization of Saint Jeanne Antide, and therefore might have been directly interested in the making of the painting.

However, what it is certain is that he attended solemn liturgical celebrations hold at the General House, sometimes alone, sometimes with other Cardinals, and sometimes even with the Queen

Mother Margherita of Savoy attending the celebration. He celebrated also solemn masses for the Congregations feast-days, led adorations of the Blessed Sacrament with particular Eucharistic benedictions. He presided also celebrations in which young candidates received their religious habit. For the first centenary of the Institute's foundation he supervised the building of St. Vincent's statue situated at the beginning of the park, not far from the chapel, and he led also the ceremony for the blessing of the statue when completed.

Besides, his visits are recorded with the words: the most Rev. Mons. Marzolini "*has left*" and "*has come back*"! This makes us think that he used to stay at the General House.

The journals report also about the beatification process and Marzolini's going and coming to and from Naples, for the canonization process as well as for the historians' committee and that examining Jeanne Antide's writing. From 15th March he is also in charge of some of our administration.

Marzolini kept up the connection between the General House and the Pope Leo XIII who was directly in touch with the Congregation and the Superior General, Leontina Vandel. In fact he used to compliment the Institute for its works of charity, he enquired about the health of the sick Sisters, he often sent presents (bottles of wine, products from the roman fields, calves and goats, precious chalices with engraving for liturgical celebrations ...). In 1887 the Sisters of Charity, lived and directed a primary school at the palace of Count Segni (province of Roma), which had been part of the Pope's family estate, and the Pope was especially pleased with their presence and work.

The Pope's nieces, the Countesses Segni, were godmothers at the naming of the new bells marking the centenary; while the school wanted by Leo XIII, and dedicated to St. Joachim, was situated between our house and the Tiber's bank! Many other information are given in the journal...

Yet what matters is that the Pope, who had known Cingolani from the time they both were in Perugia, could have been aware of the painting that is object of our study today.

What about Marzolini? He, too, was friend with Cingolani already in Perugia and then in Rome and at the Vatican.

This makes us suppose that with the opening of the canonization process came the request for the painting, perhaps also to mark the centenary of the Institute's foundation.

Looking at the painting one can notice the movement of the painting, in fact all the characters seem to make gestures and say words; one can truly perceive the interaction among all of them. One can easily appreciate Cingolani's ability to represent religious subjects, the power of his drawing as well as the space outlined in the painting.

In the painting the Pope appears benevolently listening to our Foundress who was asking for his blessings and spiritual support. Cardinal Consalvi, Secretary of State, seems to follow the conversation with satisfaction; while Cardinal Pacca, Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, who had worked a lot at the text of the Rule, is making kind gestures between the Pope and the Foundress, with his smile he seems to invite us to listen to their joyful exchange. At the

centre Jeanne Antide, kneeling at the feet of the Pope, looks like a humble and devout daughter. Behind her, remaining discreetly in the shadow, appears the Sister who went with her.

Jeanne Antide offered a finely bound copy of the Rule to the Pope. According to the testimony given by Sr Palmira Pinget at the canonization process done in Naples, the Pope exclaimed: *“Oh! That is a nice book!”* And after a short silence, looking at the Saint still kneeling before him he went on saying: *“That is a nice book ... it will also be a nice cross for you!”* (Francis Trochu, Saint Jeanne Antide Thouret Foundress of the Sisters of Charity, p. 377).

At that time Jeanne Antide was not yet aware of the pain that misunderstandings, calumnies, and misjudgements would cause her. Her concern for her daughters in France shall gradually grow. However, having kissed “the sacred foot”, according to the use of that time, she left hoping to avoid all separations and to restore the fracture which was deepening, convinced that to accept anything contrary to the Holy Fathers will would not be good, since his will was the safe way with no deceit.

Yet, as Trochu tells us: *“Mons. de Pressigny, Bishop of Besançon, shall oppose the will of the Father common to all faithful. Such attitude was followed by a vast and large conflict”.* (p. 377).

The office of Cultural Heritage of Montecassiano kept its promise. In fact their expert in local history and specialized about G. Cingolani sent his report confirming the authenticity of the painter’s signature as well as the date corresponding to the years he spent in Rome. Moreover he has too considers very likely that the painting was requested by Mons. Marzolini. The expert also stated that title given to the painting in their list is wrong. In fact, at the gallery they do not have all Cingolani’s works because many belong to private people, as it is in our case. Therefore, the painting is mentioned and attributed to Cingolani in the museum’s list yet the work is in Rome in our house.

Was it the painting we are talking about? Nothing is said! At Besançon, there is no sign of it, neither in Naples, nor in Ferrara. The paintings could be portraits coming from Besançon and of which there a copy is kept in the museum at the Grande rue.

We are still waiting for an answer from the office of Montecassiano where the experts are at work ...

We wish to get certain information and we shall work so that this painting may be part of the artistic and charismatic patrimony of our Congregation.

Meanwhile, we can admire this beautiful painting thanking the Lord for the great gift of the charism of charity presented in our Rule and showing us the way to holiness and to relive the words of our Holy Mother in 1820: *“I am a daughter of the Church”!* (LD 294).

Certainly we all shall confirm: *“Yes, we, too, are daughters of the Church”*, because *“those who stay in the barque of St. Peter will not be shipwrecked and will not be abandoned by God and by his Holy Church”!* (LD 348).

And... so be it!