

NAPLES – ROME – BESANÇON - PARIS 1818 – 1822

“Remember that God takes our human staff from us
and gives us His Cross instead.
We should receive it with faith and generosity.
That is true love of God,
which makes us true Christians,
and true Sisters of Charity”.
- to sr Marie-Anne Bon, 26th October 1817

In autumn 1817, when Mother Thouret addressed these words to the first of her daughters, everything had already happened – her call, the gift of herself to God, the Revolution, the exile, the foundation, the blossoming of the Institute, her departure to Naples, the consolidation of the Institute – yet, everything had still to happen. Four years later, in December 1821, writing to Abbot Neyre in Paris, Mother Thouret was compelled to conclude that “at present, we need to let the big storm unleashed go quiet. Then we shall see what will be possible”. The “big storm” was due to the Pontifical Brief issued in December 1819, and the many letters of clarification sent to Mgr. Cortois de Pressigny, the writing of a *Justifying Memorandum*, the painful meeting with the Archbishop of Besançon in Paris, the several interventions made by the Secretary of State, Card. Consalvi, by the Nunzio in Paris, Mgr. Macchi, the *Explanatory Memorandum* written by Abbot Filsjean, Abbot Neyre’s advice, the firm position of the Congregation of Bishop and Regulars, the authoritative support of Card. Cavazzi della Somaglia ... In Besançon there had been the decree of interdiction issued on 31st August, the vows pronounced according to the Rule of 1807, the appointment of a Superior General for the Sisters of Charity in France, the Sisters’ conscience was torn between the Bishop’s voice and that of the Holy Father and their spiritual Mother ... Abbot Neyre, addressing Sr Marie-Anne Bon in 1819, used a similar image: “New storms seem to threaten our Congregation”.

Today, we would like to use the “big storm unleashed” as a magnifier looking at the places where the storm raged – Naples, Rome, Besançon, Paris – and all the people involved – from the least Sister serving at the laundry in Besançon to the Supreme Pontiff – in order to discover if Mother Thouret really assumed the attitude she had recommended Sr Marie-Anne Bon in 1817 to have when facing a “big storm”.

Through this magnifier we hope to see something of Jeanne-Antide’s secret, and understand if the cross that life gives to all Adam’s children may be lived as tribulation or as liberation, a misfortune or a transfiguration, if it kills people causing anguish or renews people enabling them to love like God and live as true Christians and true Sisters of Charity. The years 1819-1823 when the “big storm” took place are a mine from which we can draw teachings and resources to walk towards the fullness wished for by all of us.

Naples

The Concordat of 1818 between Pious VII and Ferdinand I

When in 1815, Ferdinand of Bourbon got back his throne in the Naples' kingdom, found only 43 of the previous 131 titular Bishops. Several dioceses had become vacant because of resignations and removals which had taken place during the Decade of "the French military occupation". The majority of Bishops had been hostile to Napoleon's government and had opposed the reforms wanted by the Ministers of Worship appointed by Murat. Besides, the Holy See had not made new appointments due to the difficult relationship with the Government in Paris. The vacant dioceses had tried to self-govern themselves but in the long run they had fallen into great confusion. No civil servant had been able to replace the titular Bishop's authority.

The bishoprics did not coincide with the administrative venues and Ferdinand of Bourbon hoped to reduce the exceeding number of Bishops making a Concordat with the Holy See, which would guarantee a better collaboration after many years of conflicts between the Church and the Bourbon State. Both parties agreed on this perspective – though with different nuances – as they aimed at the modernization of the Church in the South, whose organization appeared antiquated and anachronistic, in comparison with the progress made, thanks to the French Decade, by the Neapolitan society in the political, social, economic and administrative field.

As the society's general conditions had changed and feuds had disappeared as well as other privileges of the nobility, Ferdinand was obliged to renounce to the primacy of the State over the Church, which he had tried to establish earlier in the kingdom of Naples. Instead, he had to consider religion as the needed guarantee to instill in his subjects the sense of duty and submission to God and to the State. Therefore, he promoted the teaching of the Christian doctrine, while Bishops and clergy became functional to the spreading of private and public moral education centred on people's obedience to the Bourbons' crown.

The discussion about the Concordat began in 1816, and after many disputes and disagreements, it was finally signed on 16th February 1818. Article XIV of the Concordat re-established the majority of male and female convents, according to the economic means available, with a preference for the institutes «devoted to the education of children about religion, to the care of the sick and to preaching». In 1848, in the Southern part of the Italian continent there were 39 male monastic orders with more than 12.000 members, with 848 houses and a patrimony of 40 million lira of those days. The female orders re-established were 13, with 5000 nuns in 250 monasteries. It seemed that the situation had returned as it was before the French Decade, with the repetition of vices and virtues typical of that time.

Among the effects of the Concordat of 1818 there were also – as states De Ritis¹ in the Civil Annals of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies of 1853 – "the wise measures provided by King Ferdinand I, who wanted the Rules of the pious Sr Thouret to receive the Apostolic sanction, in order to legitimate the *Central House* and the *Novitiate* of the Sisters of Charity among us"². In De Ritis' work we find the full French text of the *Supplication made by the Pious Foundress* to Pope Pious VII, as well as the Latin text of the Pontifical Brief issuing the Pontifical approval to the Institute and its Rule: "The foreseeing piety of Ferdinand I and Pious VII – concluded De Ritis – following the Concordat signed the previous year, had provided the Sovereign Assent and the Apostolic

¹ Vincenzo De Ritis was an eclectic and intellectual man or, "a hugely witted man", as he is defined in *Biografia degli Italiani illustri nelle scienze, lettere ed arti*, he animated the Pontaniana Academy and was the author of various texts, among which the famous *Vocabolario napoletano lessigrafico e storico*, unfinished for lack of funds.

² V. DE RITIS, *The Daughters and the Sisters of Charity*, in "Civil Annals of the Kingdom of two Sicilies", 1853, p. 55 ff.

Sanction legitimating the Rules of the pious Superior Director of the Sisters of Charity, who had transferred the centre of her action from Besançon to our City”.

The necessity of “legitimating the Central House and the Novitiate” providing it with the Sovereign Assent, and the Apostolic Sanction, which meant royal and pontifical approval, was due, always according to De Ritis, to the “reorganization of civil and religious Orders in the agreed harmony between Priesthood and Empire following the Concordat of 1818”. With the Pontifical approval, according to the Concordat’s politics, came also the consequent expansion of the Institute: “In 1819 the Institute received the Apostolic Sanction: and only from that year onward, with the help of God there were such prosperous successes that the *Congregation of the Sisters of Charity*, which had begun in the *Monastery of Regina Coeli*, admirably thrived, and in the year 1849 there were already 142 Houses of the Sisters of Charity and more than 900 religious could be counted in that same year”.

Rome

The role of the papacy in the Restoration

With the French Revolution breaking out and then with Napoleon’s Empire, the Church had seen most of its certainties and historic-juridical foundations supporting the papacy from the Middle ages fall apart. All over Europe the dismantling of the ecclesiastic organization of the Ancient Regime had gone through the suppression of convents, monasteries, abbeys, and religious societies; several Episcopal Sees in the dioceses had become vacant; even Bishops, clergy and faithful were divided with some approving and others opposing first the revolutionary Governments and then the Napoleonic one. In quest for a moral authority to turn to and find support, the religious crisis, caused by the Revolution, unexpectedly led to addressing the Holy See, freed by then from the archaic feudal structures¹.

If the suppression of convents, abbeys, collegiate churches, and religious orders, as well as the weakening of the Cathedrals’ Chapters, had had traumatic consequences, parish life on the contrary found new life, the authority of Bishops within their dioceses was strengthened and the Holy Father affirmed his primacy within the College of Cardinals. The Roman Pontiff’s loss of temporal power was then compensated by the strengthening of his relationship with the faithful, the clergy, and religious life. As new apostolic energies were freed, in an unforeseen way by the Revolution, the authority of the Holy See was thus associated to the new blossoming of religious life².

Those were the foundation of the spectacular missionary awakening which took place around 1840. In 1817, Pious VII reopened the doors of the Congregation for the Propagation of Faith – closed in 1809 by Napoleon – and reorganized its missionary project. He confirmed the foundation of two French missionary Congregations, the Marist and the religious of the Sacred Hearts of Picpus. Besides he created the most important missionary society of the XIX century, the *Society for the propagation of the faith*, founded by Pauline Marie Jaricot³. Therefore, as soon as Pious VII went

¹ F. J. RAMÓN SOLANS, *Le triomphe du Saint-Siège (1799-1823). Une transition de l’Ancien Régime à l’ultramontanisme?* in «Siècles» [En ligne], Cahiers du Centre d’histoire « Espaces et Cultures » 43 | 2016.

² P. BOUTRY, *Ultramontanisme*, in P. LEVILLAIN (a cura di). *Dictionnaire historique de la papauté*, Fayard, 1994, p. 1651-1653.

³ The miracle for the beatification of Pauline Jaricot was proclaimed on 26th May 2020. Born in Lyon in 1799, gifted with an exceptional missionary charisma, Pauline began the movement of the Living Rosary and the Society for the Propagation of the Faith: “My cloister is the world”. Deeply rooted in her life of prayer, Pauline created the first missionary social network. She got the intuition that missionary cooperation was not consisting in helping this or that mission, but all missions without

back to Rome after the forced exile imposed by Napoleon, he immediately dedicated his work at the pastoral and spiritual purposes of the Church, which was coming out of a long and difficult time. Among his actions there was also the reform of the Papal States, the strong impulse to missionary action in South America, Middle and Far East, the re-opening of Seminars, the establishment in Rome of the first stable Embassies, and the institution of new courses at the Roman University. The Holy See also gave strong impulse to the re-organization of religious orders, of dioceses and parishes, to the formation of the diocesan clergy, to the care of people's spiritual and moral life, to the diffusion of new devotions and piety more suitable to the demands of that time.

In spite of the persistence of monasticism in the European countries spared by the Revolution's army, and despite the reappearance of some Religious Orders during the Napoleonic time, the religious life belonging to the old tradition of the Church no longer existed at the beginning of the XIX century. However, in the years following the Napoleonic Empire's fall, a large movement of recovery promoted by the papacy began, and it went on for half a century, especially in favour of Mendicant Orders and Orders of Regular Clergy «particularly appreciated by the people for their care for the sick, education, and help in the parishes». The new female religious Congregations born after the Revolution took their first steps in the same direction, characterized by the tight intertwining of devotion and healthcare and educational services. For the whole XIX century only the parishes – then exclusively guided by secular clergy deprived of civil duties and in charge only of pastoral tasks – and the new female religious communities of active life were the only territorial presence spread everywhere and able to reach the faithful everywhere: in their homes, at work, offering them education and relief from suffering and illness.

The feminine involvement in the French Revolution – from the *cahiers de doléances et réclamation des femmes* (copybooks of women's grievance and claims), to the “October's heroines” who had marched to Versailles, and the *Club of women*, which gathered wealthy women, and were soon transformed in charitable associations, thanks to the commitment of “good Catholic women” who defended the sacramental practice of “non-sworn” priests – had made the Church aware that women could be a powerful resource for the re-evangelization of people in Europe. Pious VII, therefore, committed the Holy See to the promotion of the new female religious Congregations of active life, so that they could guarantee the spreading of the pastoral action of the Church everywhere, and even in situation that, up to that time, had never had the presence and active collaboration of religious women. Within this new pastoral sensitivity, parish priests, confessors, and spiritual directors favoured the investment of feminine energies in education and healthcare, sometimes advising against the cloistered life, although it had been purified from all the privileges, the contradictions of the ecclesiastic patrimony and the shadow of choosing monastic life due to family's strategies. Though among many obstacles, especially in Northern Europe, in those decades the foundations of a “new social Catholicism in which women became an army of professional nurses, teachers and social workers”¹ were laid.

It was within these new pastoral perspectives of the Holy See that took place the transformation of the *Sisters of Charity of Besançon* in an Institute of Pontifical right. The vocation of the daughters of Mother Thouret from its origins had placed itself in an international perspective: “Any time the opening of new houses was requested, we always saw the will of God in it and we believed that we should correspond to it without considering the pain, the difficulties, the closeness or the distance. We thought: it is where God lives, and that is enough”. The diocesan horizon was, therefore, just the cradle of a religious family always ready to be sent “all over the earth and even the sea. When God calls and we listen to Him, He gives all that is necessary”.

distinctions. With Benedict XV the Society she founded became Pontifical: its venue was transferred to Rome and transformed in POM, Pontifical Missionary Works.

¹ O. HUFTON, *Destini femminili. Storia delle donne in Europa, 1500-1800*, Mondadori, 1996, p. 329.

With the Papal approval the Institute committed itself to cooperate with the Holy Father, universal pastor of the Church, and to serve the poor in communion with the Bishops of the dioceses where the local communities of the *Sisters of Charity of Saint Jeanne Antide* were established. Thus, the Institute was fully part of the life of the universal Church, as the Secretary of State, Card. Consalvi, highlighted: “Since now it has spread in other dioceses, not only in France but also in Switzerland and in the Kingdom of Naples, the Congregation of the Daughters of Charity has assumed the quality of Institute within the Catholic Church”.

Besides providing the Sisters in all dioceses, with a certain frame of reference for their religious, apostolic and community life, the pontifical approval made explicit the position of the Institute within the life of the Church, linking its charism as an apostolic religious Congregation to the Supreme Pontiff, so that the Sisters of Charity of today and tomorrow participate in the universal mission of the Church and at the same time the universality of their mission to the poor with various services and works is guaranteed.

Besançon

**“The modifications provided by the Holy See suited
the discipline of the Churches of France”**

**“The peace and union that reign among the Sisters
would be disturbed by the new Rules”**

As we know, Mother Thouret’s hopes about the positive acceptance of the pontifical approval within the Church of Besançon were disappointed. Both the Archbishop Mgr. Cortois de Pressigny and Mgr. de Chaffoy refused to acknowledge the decisions of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars about the Institute. The well-known, reasons for their refusal depended on the will of the Besançon’s clergy to defend the rights of the Gallican Church, which attributed to the Bishops the direct jurisdiction over the religious Institute in their diocese, from the interference of Rome. The second cause of misunderstanding and refusal concerned the role of a Sister as Superior General of a centralized institute spread in various dioceses.

Years of useless clarifications, encounters, and supplications awaited Jeanne Antide. The clergy in Besançon could not accept the new model of feminine religious life as well as the perspective of an Institute established beyond the territory of the diocese. Mother Thouret’s efforts as well as the authoritative interventions of the Holy See were to no avail. In Besançon, the will of maintaining the traditional model of religious life with a strong reference to the diocese prevailed over all other reasons presented by Mother Thouret and by the Holy See with the Brief of confirmation on 14th December 1819, as well as by the interventions of the Nuncio in Paris, Mgr. Macchi, which we shall look at later on.

Other events which we are not mentioning are reported in detail in the *Appeal of Mother Thouret to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, concerning the dissent arisen in the House of Besançon*, reported in *Letters and Documents*, dated December 1819, a text little known, yet full of details about the events which immediately followed the pontifical approval.

Mother Thouret was rightly concerned about the regrettable situation faced by the Sisters in France. With her also Bishops and clergy outside the diocese of Besançon were both concerned and displeased. The Foundress took things in her hands and decided to present appeal to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, attaching to it the speech given by Mgr. de Chaffoy to the 60 Sisters gathered in retreat to “induce them not to receive the approved Rule”, she also referred to the interdiction issued against her by Mgr. Cortois de Pressigny. Mother Thouret also mentioned Besançon’s intention of appointing a Superior General for the Sisters in France. Everything suggested that “they wanted to cause a division. The Sisters, in difficulty, asked clarifications about the behaviour to have in such situations”. Therefore, the Foundress requested the Sacred Congregation to “prepare as soon as possible an effective remedy to repair the disorder caused so far, and she was full of hope about the result”.

Card. Ercole Consalvi, the Secretary of State of Pious VII, responded immediately with the Brief of 14th December 1819, also contained in *Letters and Documents*. Although not much known, the Holy See thought that this Brief would convince Mgr. Cortois de Pressigny and his Vicars. The Brief stated: “With this document, we confirm and, as it seems necessary, again we approve, the Decree concerning the Pontifical Approval of the Institute of the Sisters of Charity [...], of its Rules and Constitutions and everything contained and expressed in the mentioned Decree. To this we attribute inviolable stability, correcting completely any single defect of law or fact, in which it might have incurred in any way. We decree that the present Letters are and shall remain firm, valid and effective and shall obtain their full and complete effect”.

From here onward we have to turn to the many documents kept at the Vatican Secret Archive.

The existence at the same time of two Institutes, the *Sisters of Charity of Besançon* and the *Daughters of Charity under the protection of Saint Vincent de’ Paul*, both founded by Mother Thouret, was no longer only a possibility: all the Sisters Servant were summoned at the Mother House in Besançon to attend a retreat beginning on 11th April 1820 and concluded with the religious Vows according to the Rule of 1807, issued before the Pontifical approval and the modifications provided by it.

The Congregation of Bishops and Regulars acknowledged the position of Mgr. Cortois de Pressigny and Mgr. de Chaffoy, and on 24th January 1820 felt compelled “to conclude that it was necessary to take some prudential and beneficial steps for the happy conclusion of the dispute in the relationship with the French Court”. Thus, also the Apostolic Nuncio in Paris, Mgr. Vincenzo Macchi, shall be “exactly informed in order to take the suitable steps in the relationship with both the Archbishop of Besançon, and with the Daughters of Charity of that diocese, who might need to be reminded of their duty. Well informed the Nuncio shall be able to demonstrate to those concerned that the modifications made by the Holy See not only were not upsetting, but were convenient to the discipline of the Churches of France”.

Again the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, on 23rd May 1820 sent to Card. Consalvi a long and detailed report, in which a *Supplication* sent later by Mother Thouret to the Congregation was also mentioned, together with another *Rescript of confirmation*, addressed to the Apostolic Nuncio in Paris.

After receiving the report from the Sacred Congregation, Card. Consalvi on 30th September 1820 wrote to the Nuncio referring the whole content. The Secretary of State declared that he “considered irregular the conduct of the Archbishop of Besançon and His Holiness would not be indifferent to it”. Then he suggested to the Nuncio to “inquire first if he persists in his first intention. And in the hypothesis he persisted in it, either write to him in Besançon or meet him if he were in Paris,

showing him the convenience and also his duty to conform to the Holy Father's dispositions contained in the Brief of 14th December 1819". Consalvi was quite hopeful in the diplomatic skills of the Nuncio and in the "good qualities of Mgr. Archbishop of Besançon, which make us trust that following Mgr. Macchi's intervention, shall be the first to completely change its first intentions".

However, the Secretary of State's hope as well as the trust of the Nuncio in Paris, according to which "the sense of obedience to and devotion for the Holy See, up to then shown by the Mgr. Archbishop of Besançon, would persuade him to submission" were both disappointed.

Nonetheless, the ecclesiastics and the Roman Congregations involved in supporting Mother Thouret in such a difficult situation, were many and influential: besides the Nuncio in Paris, Mgr. Macchi, whom Mother Thouret had personally met in Rome, also the Secretary of State, Card. Consalvi, had intervened more than once, as well as Card. Bartolomeo Pacca, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, who had intervened both personally and through the unanimous vote of the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation. Also Card. Giulio Maria Cavazzi della Somaglia, Secretary of the Congregation of the Roman and Universal Inquisition, had spoken about the question with the Nuncio, and later on had written a letter of recommendation for Mother Thouret who was going to Paris.

Paris

"Persuading and unveiling the deceit"

Vincenzo Macchi, descended from a family whose origins were in Cremona, yet he was born in Capodimonte (diocese of Montefiascone), close to Viterbo in 1770. He joined the Seminary Barbarigo in Montefiascone, and attended in Rome the course of the Sapienza University in canon and civil law, then in 1794 was ordained priest.

The nine years he had spent training as a lawyer, besides teaching him to examine cases and write sentences had also made him prudent and reserved. He got various offices within the Roman Curia, first at the Nunciature in Lisbon and then as a Nuncio in Luzern. In 1818 he was appointed titular Bishop of Nisibi, yet remained in Switzerland only one year as a new diplomatic mission more prestigious and delicate than his previous ones was waiting for him. In fact, he was sent to re-establish the Nunciature in Paris, following the agreement of the Concordat signed in 1817. He stayed in Paris from 1819 to 1826, the central years of the Bourbon restoration. Before going to Paris the instructions given by the Secretariat of State included the fight against Gallicanism, and in fact this was the source of his greater worries, confirmed by the awareness of how important the supremacy of the State over the Church was to the French clergy.

When he reached the Nunciature's venue in France, which at that time was in rue de l'Élysée, in the eighth arrondissement, today hotel de Rothschildil, Mgr. Macchi found on his desk Card. Consalvi's report and a letter of Mother Thouret dated 12th August 1820, which summarized what had been said in their meeting in Rome: "Persuaded about your great goodness and the interest you show towards everything issued by the Holy See – wrote the Foundress to the Nuncio – I have no doubt that Your Excellency shall do all that is in your power and make use of all the necessary means to persuade those Lords and unveil the deceit, if they had been deceived or wanted us to believe so".

Responding to Consalvi, the Nuncio suggested to "treat the affair talking to Mgr. de Pressigny, to know his feelings, and – in case – show him the convenience and remind him of his duty to conform

to the disposition of His Beatitude the Holy Father”. However, after the conversation, Macchi wrote to Consalvi on 30th December: “The Archbishop renounced to all authority over the religious houses established outside his diocese. Yet, he still refused to accept the other amendments made to the Rule, sustaining that they would bring trouble to those religious communities used to proceed according to the old ones”. On 30th January 1821, Mgr. Cortois de Pressigny addressed a long letter to the Nuncio. In it he defended the actions of Mgr. de Chaffoy and negatively criticised the governing style of Mother Thouret, without any mention of the Pontifical Brief dated 14th December 1819, real object of the Nuncio’s conversation with him. The letter of the Archbishop of Besançon had a peremptory closure: “I won’t allow Sr Thouret to spend even twenty-four hours within the communities of the diocese of Besançon”.

At the end of September 1821, Mother Thouret, having received a recommendation letter by Card. Cavazzi della Somaglia, got ready to go to Paris, with the purpose of obtaining a personal encounter with the Archbishop. A new plenary Assembly of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, gathered on 17th September 1821, had, in fact, "read and considered the papers sent from Paris and had confirmed unanimously what had already been stated and confirmed by the Brief of the Supreme Pontiff". After receiving communication of the unanimous deliberation of the plenary, the Nuncio met again the Archbishop of Besançon, yet fruitlessly: "Mgr. Archbishop – wrote the Nuncio to Card. Pacca, Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars – is not able to subdue his feelings and accept the visit of the current Superior, with whom he seems to be quite annoyed. The same negative idea is shared by the current Bishop of Nîmes [Mgr. de Chaffoy] who thought she lacked the qualities and prerogatives needed to govern well. Therefore, Mgr. Archbishop cannot induce himself to receive her in his diocese – had to admit the Nuncio – despite my most heartfelt and repeated requests, as he is persuaded that it would cause, as he say, discontent and trouble to those religious houses where everything now goes on in perfect peace and tranquillity".

Although he promised not to cease “doing whatever is possible to lead him to submission”, Mgr. Macchi on 26th January 1822, writing about the Sisters of Saint Camillus in Paris, felt compelled to present “the discontent and strong opposition to the application of the Pontifical Brief regarding the Daughters of Charity in the diocese of Besançon”.

Seen the unfortunate result obtained treating the affair talking to Mgr. Cortois de Pressigny, the issuing of official documents became necessary: on 17th February 1822, the Nuncio in Paris wrote formally what had been discussed confidentially with Mgr. Cortois de Pressigny. The paper is also contained in *Letters and Documents*. It is a long document, in which Mgr. Macchi used solemn words, insisting on the authority with which he had made a precise request: “To take away soon all obstacles, by ordering that the Apostolic Brief may be observed by the Daughters of Charity in your diocese, making them understand how important it is to respect the authority of the Holy See and to conform to its beneficial dispositions”.

Mgr. Macchi in his document insisted on the international nature of the Congregation at the time of Mother Thouret’s *Supplication* to Pious VII, he described step by step the procedure to get the pontifical approval with the “severe examinations” undergone, made a list of all the Decrees the Holy See had to issue due to the opposition of Mgr. Cortois de Pressigny, he spent a whole paragraph to praise the Institute of Mother Thouret which was “such an honour for our religion and so useful to society. The whole city of Rome clapped at this charitable initiative so eminently Catholic, and to the huge good which is spreading over all classes of the miserable and suffering humanity”. He, then, emphasized that “the Cardinal and Prelates most prepared on this kind of questions had been consulted in Rome about that Institute whose beneficial effects should not be limited to only one diocese, but expand to the whole Catholicity”. He mentioned again the discussions and the “most attentive and severe examination” which had preceded the pontifical

approval. He dedicated a long paragraph to praise “the Bishops from various dioceses in Italy, Savoy, Switzerland, who had the joy of having in their territory the Daughters of Charity and which had been solicitous in welcoming and applying the Brief”. All these – stressed Mgr. Macchi – convened on the wisdom and righteousness of the Rules to be followed”.

Finally, Mgr. Macchi came to the core question insisting that: “Therefore, it would be very painful to His Holiness to hear that the place which had been the cradle of this excellent Institute would oppose his personal interest in the order he has established and the enjoyment of spiritual favours he deigned to grant. Therefore, Monseigneur, I renew the same instances which I had the honour to present to you personally when we discussed the above subject. I do hope they won’t remain without the vividly hoped for effects, for the general good of this excellent Institute, as well as for the uniformity, the union and the harmony among the particular religious houses belonging to it. This would bring great consolation to His Holiness”.

Even the bad reputation Mother Thouret had according to Mgr. Cortois de Pressigny was dealt with in a direct and definitive way, as the Vicar general of Besançon, Canon Durand, during the vacant See of Cortois de Pressigny, had given “very honourable testimony on all aspects about the qualities of Madam Thouret and the zeal she had deployed in your diocese and in many others”. After recalling the very good reputation Mother Thouret had also enjoyed during her stay in Rome, the Nuncio declared that he could not understand “for what big mistakes she might have lost your esteem, to the point of refusing her the possibility of going back to the first religious house she had founded and governed for long time with everybody’s satisfaction”.

The conclusion of Mgr. Macchi does not allow replies: “I renew, Monseigneur, the same instances which I had the honour to present to you personally when we discussed the above subject. I do hope they won’t remain without the vividly hoped for effect, for the general good of this excellent Institute, as well as for the uniformity, the union and the harmony among the particular religious houses belonging to it. This would bring great consolation to His Holiness”.

The answer of Mgr. Cortois de Pressigny, given very soon afterwards, is also contained in *Letters and Documents*. Though proclaiming his “deference to the Holy See”, the Archbishop of Besançon began again from the las topic, that is, the bad reputation of Mother Thouret, even talking negatively of his predecessor, Vicar Durand, defined “good and indulgent”. The clergy in Besançon – stated Cortois de Pressigny – can testify against Mother Thouret, especially Mgr. de Chaffoy, current Bishop of Nîmes. The second question raised by the Archbishop of Besançon concerned the name given by the Holy See, ‘Daughters of Charity under the protection of Saint Vincent de’ Paul’: “It cannot be ignored in Rome that in France a very extended and useful society has been in existence for two centuries, – he meant the Daughters of Saint Vincent de’ Paul of Paris – which shall not be indifferent to the fact that the name it has always carried with honour, I would say even with glory, shall be shared by a recent society. I do not think that the French Government shall tolerate the identical denomination, which might cause serious inconveniences and is unfair. Our Sisters of Besançon – concluded Mgr. Cortois de Pressigny – shall be true daughters of Saint Vincent practicing piety, humility and charity, but they won’t dispute the title with those who acquired the right to it many years ago”. In this way he ended his letter, mentioning neither the Brief, nor the interventions of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, nor the will and the personal interest of His Holiness the Pope Pious VII, nor the canonical difficulties of Bishops and parish priests outside the diocese of Besançon, nor the internal conflict experienced by the French Sisters.

The Foundress came to know from the Nuncio about the firm position taken and kept by Mgr. Cortois de Pressigny. The “big storm” was not over yet. Next time Sr Christiane Marie shall talk to us about the painful stay of Mother Thouret in Paris from 2nd November 1821 to January 1823.

Now we can only ask Jeanne Antide to reveal us a bit of her secret. In autumn 1817 she had exhorted Sr Marie-Anne Bon to accept with faith and generosity the staff of the Holy Cross which God puts in our hands. In winter 1823 she wrote to Sr Geneviève Boucon: “It is at the feet of Jesus Crucified that I draw all the strength I need”. Thus, Mother Thouret declared the clear awareness of her dependence on a greater strength, that of the Crucifix, and also her determination to adapt her life to it. Her life shall be more and more marked by forgiveness, the gift of self, a merciful attitude, a trustful surrender to love, which is the source of life. At the feet of Jesus Crucified, Jeanne Antide understood that the strength which enables us to resist “in the big storm” does exist and lead us there where it calls us. By surrendering trustfully to God alone and accepting the love of the Crucifix it is possible to go through the storms of life and come out of them transformed.

In January of the following year, in fact, while writing to Canon Adinolfi, she re-read in a spiritual way the situation in which the houses in France were stuck: “We thrust ourselves completely in the arms of the divine Providence for what concerns France. Following the advice of the Holy See we have taken all the steps which seemed suitable to achieve the spiritual reunion; we have not succeeded yet. Therefore, we leave to the mercy of God the care of this affair, which since long we have put in His hands; His Holy Will may be made and everything may return to His glory: these are the feelings that fill my heart”.

What are the feelings which fill the heart of Mother Thouret? She entrusted herself to God, as a daughter into her Father’s arms. She tried to re-live all circumstances and events, and “all the steps” taken during the big storm to achieve the spiritual reunion. She accepted her failure: we are still far. She did so with great faith in God, she surrendered trustfully, she was grateful and merciful. At the feet of Jesus Crucified through her faith Jeanne Antide could see that everything was for the glory of God: a heart who had gone through bitterness, resentment, disappointment, and anger... could come out of the storm transfigured and filled with mercy, surrender to Providence and trust in God. Even the big storm can be, and certainly is, where a new creation takes place.

Suor Paola Arosio
Mattine del Sabato
9th January 2021

Per il testo con le note, scrivere una mail a sisterpaola@hotmail.com

Vincenzo Macchi by Giuseppe Monsagrati – Biographic Dictionary about Italians - Volume 67, 2006

At the end of the Parisian mission, in 1826, Macchi got from Leo XII the appointment as a Cardinal with the title of the basilica of Saints John and Paul. Though, he was a man of the Curia with his own singular yet well founded vocation for administrative functions, economy and internal order, after his diplomatic career was called to do pastoral service, first as a Papal Legate in Ravenna from 1828, and up to 1829 also in Forlì, then from 1836 to 1841 in Bologna.

In the first case he did well establishing a good relationship with the people, interceding in their favour in occasion of their insubordination giving the impression that his meekness tempered his

legalistic rigidity. He never got involved in polemics and some persecuted liberal acknowledged "the good disposition of his soul".

As Papal Legate in Bologna, he did not hesitate to signal the people's discontent about the abuses of the "Papal volunteers", a special body for the defence and security of the Papal States, to the annoyance of the police; he also highlighted the delay in administering justice and the excessive length of trials.

At the same time Macchi had taken part in some Congregations: that of St. Uffizio, from 1831, and from 1834 as the Prefect of the Congregation of the Council. Thus, he got visibility, whose effects became clear during the conclave of 1831, after the death of Pious VIII, yet, France vetoed his name due to the good relationships he had kept in the past with the just fallen Bourbons. It seems that the foreseeable French hostility caused by similar considerations would prevent soon afterwards his appointment as Secretary of State, although the neo-elected Gregory XVI would not have been displeased about it. The choice fell instead on Card. T. Bernetti, which Macchi criticized a lot and rightly for his too personal and not enough collegial way of handling power and the insufficient provisions in the administrative field.

In 1840 he was appointed Bishop of Palestrina and in 1844 for the diocese of Porto Santa Rufina and Civitavecchia; finally, from 1847 he was Bishop of Ostia and Velletri. Among the offices he had within the Congregations he became Prefect at the Signature of Justice and Ceremonies from 1851, and secretary of St. Uffizio. The office that gave him great gratification was perhaps the Presidency of the Congregation for the Auditing of Accounts, where he adopted measures to pay the many debts and relaunching the economy of the Papal States. When in 1844 it became necessary to put order in the accounts of the Holy Spirit Bank, he was a member of the committee working at its budgetary consolidation.

Hardworking even in old age he enjoyed the evenings organized by the Borghese, a princely and Papal Italian family originally from Siena, which for centuries was very influential in political, religious and artistic history of Rome, Siena and the whole Italy.

With the election of Pious IX, Macchi was one of the most consulted Cardinals during the reformation period, also for his ability to moderate the wish for innovation of the new Pontiff. Though always afraid of going too far, his was never a deadly opposition and he was never prejudiced against what was new. The events of 1848-49 and perhaps his old age brought him very close to Pious IX, also because he was the only one who as Dean, (being the Bishop of Ostia), was able to see the Pope in all circumstances.

At the end of his life his spirituality became evident: in 1855 he did the pastoral visit to Velletri to see the religious situation of the province.

His passion for economics and State's budget were still strong in the second half of the XIX century, when he was not afraid of speaking of the awful crisis for the treasury of the Holy See. To overcome that crisis he ordered to withdraw the banknotes, cut waste, reduce government spending, and hit voluptuous consumption. About this he stated that to provide a model of good practice Cardinals should have renounced to their carriages. In 1853, Pious IX called him to be part of a special Congregation in charge of finding out ways to solve the crisis: slowly the situation improved and in 1859 the budget was balanced again.

In 1855 Macchi brilliantly escaped death unpredictably recovering from a serious illness, yet he died in Rome few years later in 1860, one month before his ninetieth birthday. He was buried in the Saint John and Paul' Basilica at Celio, of which he had been titular.