

SPIRITUAL WRITINGS

of Venerable

MARIA BARTOLOMEA CAPITANIO

PRIME FOUNDRESS

OF THE SISTERS OF CHARITY
IN LOVERE

drawn from manuscripts
with notes

by

LUIGI IGNAZIO MAZZA S.J.

Volume One

LETTERS

MODENA

TIP. PONTIFICIA ED ARCIVESCOVILE
DELL'IMMACOLATA CONCEZIONE

1904

Imprimatur,
si iis ad quos spectat ita videbitur.

Mantova, 4 January 1904.

J.B. Rossi S.J.
Praep. Prov. Ven.

Nihil obstat

ANGELUS Adv. MARIANI S.R.C. Assessor.

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A.M.D.G.
(*AD MAIOREM DEI GLORIAM*)

THE COMPILER
HEREWITH PRESENTS AND DEDICATES

**THESE SPIRITUAL MEMORIES
OF VEN. B. CAPITANIO**

TO VERY REV. MOTHER **MARIA ANGELA GHEZZI**
SUPERIOR GENERAL

TO ALL THE REV. **SISTERS OF CHARITY**

SO THAT
THE SPIRIT OF THEIR PRIME FOUNDRESS
MAY LIVE ON
AMONG HER DAUGHTERS

CONTENTS

Dedication	page	V
Author's Foreword	"	VII
Preliminary Note	"	3

YEAR 1824

1. — <i>To a former fellow Boarder - 15 March</i>	page	5
Thanks and expressions of friendship.		
2. — <i>To Lucia Romelli - 18 June</i>	"	7
She apologizes - Love for the Cross - Feast of Our Lady of Mt Carmel.		
3. — <i>To Marianna Vertova - 21 August</i>	"	10
Playful remarks - She promotes Pious Sodalties - She encourages her to become Jesus' Bride - to be zealous for the salvation of souls - to practise charity towards the poor - to put aside all that is worldly.		
4. — <i>To the same - 5 September</i>	"	15
She encourages her to respond to the call of the Divine Spouse and cast aside worldly vanities - She expects greater confidence in her - She asks for a prayer to Maria Bambina.		

5. —	<i>To the same - December</i>	page	18
	Skilful ways of ensuring spiritual benefit of others - Outdoing each other in preparing for Christmas by acts of self-denial - Use of corporal penance.		

YEAR 1825

6. —	<i>To Marianna Vertova - 21 January</i>	"	22
	She apologizes for delay - News - She encourages her to perform practices of penance to make up for sinners' offences.		
7. —	<i>To the same - 26 March</i>	"	25
	Spiritual consolation - In praise of vow of Chastity.		
8. —	<i>To the same - 22 April</i>	"	28
	She congratulates her on her vow of Chastity.		
9. —	<i>To Don Angelo Bosio - 1 June</i>	"	30
	Devotional practices for herself and friends.		
10. —	<i>To Marianna Vertova - 3 June</i>	"	32
	On love for Mary shown during the past month of May.		
11. —	<i>To the same - 17 June</i>	"	34
	She ardently desires that they help each other in acquiring virtue - Familiarity with St Aloysius.		
12. —	<i>To Giulia & Lucia Romelli - 25 June</i>	"	36
	Condolence and comfort after the manner of St Aloysius.		
13. —	<i>To Don Angelo Bosio - 24 July</i>	"	39
	She sorrows over her pride.		
14. —	<i>To Lucia & Giulia Romelli - 6 August</i>	"	41
	Delay in writing due to Mother's sickness.		
15. —	<i>To Marianna Vertova - 27 August</i>	"	43
	She mentions a fever she has had - She suggests tactful methods in conducting Pious Union meetings - She congratulates her on the vow of Chastity.		

16. –	<i>To the same - 30 September</i>	page	47
	Expressions of affection - of humility - Advice and holy skills for conducting a Pious Union for girls.		
17. –	<i>To Maria Dò - 1 October</i>	“	51
	Desire to see her.		
18. –	<i>To Lucia & Giulia Romelli - 6 November</i>	“	53
	Yearning for Heaven.		
19. –	<i>To Marianna Vertova - 20 November</i>	“	55
	Preparing for the Cross.		
20. –	<i>To Bartolomea Dò - 17 December</i>	“	57
	She asks her to forward a parcel to Don Angelo Bosio.		
21. –	<i>To Marianna Vertova - 22 December</i>	“	58
	Devout practice for Christmas Night and Octave to be performed with other friends - She refers to what God expects from her friend.		
22. –	<i>To Lucia Romelli - 22 December</i>	“	62
	Outbursts of passionate love of God - Devotional practice for Christmas Night and Octave for herself and friends.		

FOREWORD TO THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION

The present volume reproduces the **vol. I** of the **SPIRITUAL WRITINGS OF VEN. BARTOLOMEA CAPITANIO** collected by Luigi Ignazio Mazza sj and published in Italian in 1904.

This includes the **LETTERS** of Bartolomea, which Mazza had at his disposal, according to the interpretation, transcription and the chronological order proposed by him.

This collection also has been translated in English by **Sr. Maximilla Saydon**, and revised several times by other sisters, both in Italy and in India.

Its publication **follows that of the III vol. of Spiritual Writings**, carried out in 2016 by Brilliant Printers, Bangalore. Therefore it is asked to refer to the **Presentation** of that text (pp II-III), which explains the aim of the initiative and the care taken to make the format and contents correspond substantially to the numbering of pages of the text of Mazza and thereby to facilitate consultation.

With regard to the present edition, it is noted:

- in the translation the numerous titles and attributes have been very often simplified - expressions of courtesy, typical of the times - reserved to the addressee of the **LETTERS**, however without disregarding the overall sense, and those with which Bartolomea, while signing, defines herself. These latter ones were often popular ways of saying, written at times using acronyms that are difficult or it is not always possible to retrieve the correct meaning;
- the use of capital letters, very persistent in Bartolomea, does not follow any precise rule. It should also be kept in mind that for an exact comparison, we do not have at our disposition a

critical edition of the original Manuscripts, which Mazza has used. Hence, regarding the use of capital/small letters, not always there is a strict correspondence with the text in Italian. Only in certain case, a clear emphasis has been respected;

- the Notes added by Mazza in the body of the LETTERS have been quoted in normal character; those in italics, instead, are according to the translators, made necessary in order to understand some terms written in Latin, or in dialect, or in Italian prevalent in the Eighteenth century.

Thanks to all the sisters who have collaborated in this demanding and meticulous work of translation and compilation of this volume of LETTERS. May it be useful to go deeper into the richness of Bartolomea's spiritual experience, which has nourished and continues to nourish our Institute.

April 2018

*Edited by: **Sisters of Charity of Saints
Bartolomea Capitanio and Vincenza Gerosa
Via Santa Sofia 13, Milan – Italy***

N.B. The anastatic reprinting of 1968 comprises a Note upon the "HISTORICAL AND SPIRITUAL SOURCES OF THE INSTITUTE OF THE SISTERS OF CHARITY OF SAINTS BARTOLOMEA CAPITANIO AND VINCENZA GEROSA" useful for the knowledge of the original sources, collected by Mazza and for their authenticity, which for right reasons will be printed apart.

AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

The writings of Venerable Bartolomea Capitanio, duly approved by the Sacred Congregation for Rites in view of her Beatification, are now published in three parts. Part One contains her letters. Part Two will contain the rest of her writings meant for the good of her neighbour. In Part Three there will appear what the Servant of God wrote for her own spiritual progress.

Several times, now and again, there have appeared in print passages from her writings either in appendix to her biography by the eminent Fr. G. Scandella, or separately. But none of these partial publications reproduced exactly the full original text: for some reason or other, some writings were cut short or interpolations were inserted into it.

It has therefore been thought advisable to compile a complete edition as much as possible leaving the writings as

they are, for two reasons: because the writings that saints have left after them are always valuable and deserve to be gathered and cherished for the veneration of the faithful, and also in order to continue the beneficial apostolic activity that the Servant of God carried out through her writings in her short lifespan¹.

In fact, one can hardly even imagine how much fervour of spirit and of a sound Christian life she succeeded in radiating through her writings in her native town of Lovere itself, all over the Valle Camonica and in many other places within the Dioceses of Brescia and Bergamo, not only for the benefit of girls and older women but also for the spiritual good of eminent and devout Priests, among whom it is sufficient to mention Fr Angelo Taeri of the Oratorio of Brescia, Count Marco Passi and Count Tomini, Archpriest of the Bergamo Clergy Chapter. These priests turned to her for advice, and were inspired to move ever ahead along the path of perfection by her suggestions on devout practices and methods of life suited to priestly life.

Of one of her letters it is narrated how it was passed around in a country-town, and its salutary effect on the people was, according to what the parish Priest of the place said, as great as that of a preached Mission. – One can therefore hope that an apostolic activity of that kind, spread by means of the

¹ Ven. Bartolomea Capitanio was born at Lovere on 13 January 1807 and died at Lovere itself at the age of 26, on 26 July 1833.

Press over a vaster field, should reproduce a hundredfold the same abundant fruits.

No wonder, then, that the letters of Venerable Bartolomea were, even in her lifetime, highly valued by eminent Priests of Brescia and Bergamo Dioceses, and that Bishop Nava of Brescia himself was in possession of several letters of hers and cherished them with jealous care.

In this regard it is fitting to quote what her Confessor and Rev. Parish Priest of Lovere, Don Angelo Bosio, testified during the canonical Processes: «To write anything at all, she did not need to put in much effort; her pen ran smoothly and speedily like water from a fountain. At times she would write whole booklets without having to cancel any mistake; as a rule she never had to make a rough copy, and there was about all her writings such an unction and spiritual wisdom that they were held, and are still held, in great esteem, as an effective means to instil a deep faith and a sound piety. As I read them, I am impelled to repeat what I said in another place (about the Rules of a Pious Union for Priests and Virgins), referring to what was affirmed by Count canoeist Tomini. “These are the writings of a Saint” and “Saints’ things are not to be touched”».

With that sense of respect, in fact, her writings are kept as close as possible to her autograph original script, slightly correcting here and there only where it is a question of grammatical construction or spelling so as to render the reading smoother and more pleasant. – The few defects that remain can be partly due to her deliberate intention to humble her self-love (she herself furnished evidence of this), and

partly to the large amount she had to write which, come to think of it, was most astonishing for a young girl who was often sick, very busy teaching at her own school, keeping the house clean or running the Hospital, conducting 'Oratorio' meetings and directing so many Sodalities, not to mention the considerable time dedicated to devotional practices or to works of charity for the benefit of her neighbour.

What has been compiled in this edition cannot be considered complete at all. Witnesses during the Processes agree in attesting on the vast amount of her writings. Several of them say that for a long period of time she used to receive a letter from her every day. Others say that she «used to spend night hours writing out novenas, triduums, methods of life, etc» – because a «constant flow of requests for novenas, devotional practices and methods of life came from very many people, including parish priests, eminent spiritual directors, persons of high merit, and her writings were distributed in very many country-towns»; – «It is almost incredible how a young girl could do so much in her short lifespan». Lastly, it was said, «Her Guardian Angel must have come to her assistance to enable her to write so many letters and so many other writings, without ever neglecting her other duties: more especially, that all are not only well written but also permeated with heavenly wisdom and with evidence of a life of holiness, illumined by God himself». From these and similar testimonials we can easily infer that there must have been very many more letters, a large part of which has unfortunately got lost.

This appears more likely to be the case from the fact that in the last days of her life Ven. Bartolomea threw a fat bundle of her writings into the fire, keeping for herself only a prayer-book which she constantly used till the very end. Moreover, we can suppose that other papers written by her and sent to friends who in turn passed them on to a third or fourth person, less careful than they to keep them safely, must have either been destroyed, or gone out of sight and out of mind in such a manner that not even the best attempts of the Bishop of Brescia and his Curia could find them.

However, what does remain and is here compiled and offered to the public, seems more than just sufficient to nourish a firm hope that it will attain the purpose here intended: to the greater glory of God and the growth in holiness of other persons. In that case the compiler will consider himself amply rewarded for his humble toil.

LETTERS

PRELIMINARY NOTE

These letters were written between the years 1824 and 1833. They are presented in chronological order.

In quite a few of the original scripts, due to the wear-and-tear of time or for some other reason, the date or the address is lacking. These could be supplied for several of them by means of evidence gathered from the letters themselves or from other sources, and the letters could also be arranged in the order in which they were written.

Letters which bore insufficient data and could not be arranged in chronological order, were compiled in a separate series, in alphabetical order of the surnames of persons to whom they were addressed.

Titles, dates, addresses and writer's imprint were printed as found in autograph-letters.

To make up for missing addresses, each letter is introduced by a brief indication on its contents. Dates inferred, though not found in autograph-letters, appear in brackets.

YEAR 1824

Letter 1

TO A FORMER FELLOW BOARDER

Thanks and expressions of friendship.

Dearly beloved Friend,

Words fail me as I try to describe to you how my heart leaped for joy when your kind letter was handed to me, all the more so because in it I see traced out the characteristic features of friendship. It is a friendship that is genuine and true, and as such it cannot be wiped out though the persons it links together are physically apart and far from each other.

I have fond memories of you, my dear friend, and of all my fellow boarders you are certainly the one I remember best. It makes me very happy to know that by God's grace you are keeping well. Same with me.

Perhaps you think that by now I am back in the big, wide world; by God's special favour I am still in this happy Retreat¹

¹ St Clare's Convent, where she was a boarder from Autumn 1818 to July 1822. She stayed back as an Approved Teacher till 18 July 1824.

and I hope I will stay some time longer. I beg you to pray God for me that I may be as He wishes me to be. I shall do the same for you.

It will be difficult for me to meet the friends you asked me to give your wishes to. However, if I can, I will do it gladly. From here I send you the wishes of our Reverend Sister-Teachers and of the Boarders.

If you write again I will always appreciate it, and you will always have my reply. I end this letter with the request that you count me among the friends who care for what is of real good to you.

Ever yours,

From the Boarding School, Lovere

15 March 1824

Your loving friend

CAPITANIO BORTOLAMEA

Letter 2

TO LUCIA ROMELLI

She apologizes - Love for the Cross - Feast of Our Lady of Mt Carmel.

Dearest Sister in the Lord,

Forgive me, I beg you, for being too thoughtless and lazy to write to you sooner. My heart kept chiding me for being so ungrateful and unmindful of a friend who has always been so loyal and loving. But the thought that in your goodness of heart you would forgive my fault made me negligent. Once more I beg you to forgive me for it. I promise I will be more faithful to you in future.

I should like to know if what I wished for you has come true. Oh! How I wish the blessed Cross, the value and worth of which is infinite, to be your inseparable companion! With what confidence could we approach our most gentle Spouse, when we see ourselves laden with the same cross that he himself, for our sake, embraced and bore with heroic patience to the extent of leaving on it, as a victim, his most sacred Body?

Ah, dear Lucia, let us cherish the Cross as our greatest treasure, and let us heartily thank God when he favours us with one, since it is the greatest gift he can give us in view of Heaven. As for me, I have not so far had the good fortune to partake of this treasure of infinite merits, for the Lord has always treated me with mildness, knowing how imperfect and weak I am. However, should the Lord graciously send me a few in future, I earnestly beg of you, pray God to give me the grace of behaving in a manner that will make him happy with me.

Our greatest Solemnity of Our Lady of Mt Carmel¹ is drawing near. Will it be for us as happy and pleasant a day as it was last year? For myself I'm not so sure: according to the fervour with which I do the Novena, God too will shower his graces on me. But as I am sure you will observe the Novena wonderfully well, with extraordinary fervour, for charity's sake let me join you, and all the good you do, please offer it also for me.

Give my warm wishes to Giulia; tell her I am waiting for her letter. Ask her to give a loving kiss on my behalf to St Aloysius on his feast day. To your gracious Mother, please express my deep esteem.

¹ On the feast of Our Lady of Carmel she consecrated herself to Jesus through the vow of Chastity.

I don't feel like cutting short this sweet chat with you, but it is late in the night and I am sleepy, and so I must end, with all my stupid things. Goodbye, dearly beloved in the Lord.

Love, 18 June 1824.

Your loving Sister and Friend
CAPITANIO BARTOLAMEA

to Esteemed Lady
LUCIA ROMELLI
CIVIDATE.

Letter 3

TO MARIANNA VERTOVA

Playful remarks - She promotes Pious Sodalties - She encourages her to become Jesus' Bride - to be zealous for the salvation of souls - to practise charity towards the poor - to put aside all that is worldly.

Dearly beloved Sister,

LET US LOVE JESUS – LET US PRAISE MARY

First of all, lest I forget, let me tell you something I've been wanting to mention, and it is this: I should like to know if you have received a letter Mother Mistress wrote to you as far back as the early days of July. If by chance you have received it, tell Mother Mistress, because she is eager to know that, and also whether you are doing what she told you about the Novenas, etc.

Now let's talk about us.

What caused me special merriment in your letter was your surprise at my second 'obstacle', because it makes me see that you really care for me. Quite honestly, I had no doubt about it; in fact, I did not mean it seriously, but I just wanted to make sure in order to be more open with you. Oh well! Enough

of these jests! They are mere compliments, which are of little or no use for progress in our path to holiness.

I said: let's talk about us. I say it again: let's talk about us. I know you have that 'secret' Pious Sodality¹. I should very much like to know if it has a (Spiritual) Director and if it is well-established. You must know that it is very conducive to a truly sound piety, provided you participate in it with fervour, not in the slow, tepid way that I do. Oh well! May the Lord grant me a little fervour which I greatly desire.

Besides that Sodality, there is also the Union of the Heart of Jesus, which is so profitable that no words could commend it fittingly enough. It is not meant for a restricted membership as the other one is; in fact, the more members it has, the better it works. Should you feel like joining this one also, you have only to drop me a hint and I will do as you desire.

To explain what it is in a letter is not so easy. But my parents, who had promised to take me to Cervenò, assured me they will also take me to Malegno, close by, to see you, and so we can talk over it together. Don't mind the liberty that I take.

I should very much like to know if you have a Confessor

¹ Various Pious Unions were erected in Lovere and neighbouring country-towns by Bartolomea Capitanio, who kept them alive.

you feel at ease with, and if he lets you receive Holy Communion and make corporal penance, etc. – Don't fail to give me this information, which I am very keen to have. Don't think this desire is simply curiosity on my part, no. Quite honestly, it is a good desire, which is meant to be of spiritual benefit to you and also to me.

What I am particularly anxious to know, besides, is if the Lord is still keeping in you the desire to become his Bride. If that is so, I would be extremely glad of it, and I would also have a thing to suggest, but ... I have a certain doubt ... a doubt ... certainly not about your virtue, which, I know, is already well-advanced by now, but that it may be a thing that the Lord does not want from you. However, if you feel urged to ask me what it is, do so and I will tell you, since I too feel inspired to put these questions to you. Maybe you have already done what I had a mind to ask you about; in that case we shall both thank the Lord who has graciously granted you such an exceptional favour.

Dear Sister, we are, it is true, in the midst of the perils of this world, surrounded by evil, cut off from what is good; but let us take comfort in the thought that we have to stay in it just a little while, after all. However, let us make the best use of that little while, so that we may become the Lord's favoured ones. Let us do our best to draw souls to Him by word and example. I know you are already trying hard, and I am immensely glad. I am ashamed of my own indolence, but I too want to set my heart on doing all I can for the spiritual good of others. Pray the Lord that I may succeed and so we may both have the

happiness of having drawn many souls to the love of our good God. Let us have a preferential love for the poor. They are the living image of Jesus Christ. Let us help them as much as we can, even if it may cost us at times. Let us remember that in so doing we are sure to please our most loving Jesus. This should be a sufficient reason to urge us to do it promptly and eagerly. In short, let us set the world aside and love God, abhor worldly vanities and seek humiliations, shun worldly honours and crave for the dishonour of the Cross: in a word, let us try to imitate our Spouse in a manner worthy of Him, and we shall one day be very glad to have done so.

You will say that I am eager to play the Teacher in spirituality, while I am not even a good pupil. You are quite right, for this is part of my subtle pride that likes to teach, not to be taught. However, I know I can count on you to be kind and understanding, and ask you to be a teacher to me, too; I will really appreciate it as a precious gift from you.

I always keep you in my prayers to God. However, I suggest we could make a 'pact': to offer our Holy Communion once a week for each other. I stop here because I am too tired to write any more, certainly not out of any fear that you get bored. And let me tell you: you really wrong me every time you say that you are afraid you may tire me out, as if a friend or rather an affectionate sister, could get tired reading the news of a companion. Even if your letters ran on for hundreds of

pages, I would certainly not find them tedious. I trust you will be the same with me.

Oh well! I will never finish. Zitti has not received your letter. She, and all the others, send you their wishes. Please give my sincere regards to your Parents. I leave you in the Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

Lovere, 21 August 1824.

Your loving Sister

BORTOLAMEA CAPITANIO

to Esteemed Lady

MARIANNA VERTOVA

MALEGNO.

Letter 4

TO THE SAME

She encourages her to respond to the call of the Divine Spouse and cast aside worldly vanities - She expects greater confidence in her - She asks for a prayer to Maria Bambina.

Dearly beloved Sister,

HAIL TO THE LOVE OF JESUS – AND OF MARY

I avail myself of the opportunity offered by the return home of a person from your place to send you what I have written.

Your last letter brought me much joy, seeing that my advice had left a sweet impression on you. This is because your spirit is so receptive to the voice of our Lover Jesus who in various ways is calling you to follow him. I beseech you, Marianna, don't let the most sweet calling of the divine Spouse fall on deaf ears, but respond at once, like Samuel: «*Speak, Lord, speak, for your handmaid is listening*»; do speak to your servant-girl who with deep delight is listening to you. And then, once you understand what the Lord expects from you, set about carrying it out with a rejoicing heart. I trust that worldly vanities have no hold on your heart, which should belong entirely to Jesus. But suppose they do a little bit, (since these

are things that creep in through every crevice), let the first sign of your fidelity to God be that of abandoning them altogether. As to me, worldly vanities do try to creep in, too, but the thought of death has impressed itself on me so strongly that all thought of worldly vanity is driven away. Ah! Heaven is beautiful beyond all telling. It is worth every effort we can make to deserve it. What will it matter if we are unknown, looked down upon, forsaken or ill-treated in this world, where we have so little time to dwell? Let us be concerned with appearing beautiful in God's sight and becoming great in Heaven; as for the world, let us put it underfoot, let us show it how little we care for it: in short, let us live of God and in God.

By the way, I was not very happy with your replies. Your way of answering leaves me in doubt. I don't accept the excuses you bring: neither lack of time, because I don't think it will take you so much time to write a few lines, nor the incapacity you say you have, because I don't think that is true at all. Write to me only what God in His goodness grants you to write, no more.

I think it is rather due to a certain lack of confidence in me; in other words, you prefer to keep your affairs to yourself. If that is the case, I don't blame you at all for not answering my questions, because you are not obliged to give me an account of what you do. What I am asking is that you explain yourself clearly so that I may know how to proceed in future.

With regard to my coming to those parts, I cannot say when

exactly it will be, because my sister is having some trouble with her eyes, and so we are waiting that she is cured of it and then take her with us too.

Shortly after receiving your letter I had the happy surprise of seeing 'sister' Rachel, but she was in a hurry. I told her what you wanted, but she could not undertake to do anything about it because she was anxious to reach her home town soon.

Commend me to Maria Bambina; pray that she be born again in my heart and make me wholly her own. I will do the same for you, poor though I am. For the time being I sign off here and leave you, and in case you wish to get me again, I will be locked up in the Heart of Jesus. I invite you, too, to come to this Divine Heart, where we shall have together our fixed abode. Goodbye, dearly beloved. Goodbye.

Lovere, 5 September 1824.

Your loving Sister
CAPITANIO BORTOLAMEA

Letter 5

TO THE SAME

Skilful ways of ensuring spiritual benefit of others - Outdoing each other in preparing for Christmas by acts of self-denial - Use of corporal penance.

Dearest Sister,

HAIL TO THE LOVING CHILD – HAIL TO HIS BELOVED MOTHER

First of all, with regard to what you had ordered: I don't remember what books you ordered during your visit, but if you want them, please tell me which ones, first time you write, and I will do my best to let you have them soon.

Next, not to mix up material things with spiritual matters: I have given your wishes to all those persons (male and female) you told me of, and they reciprocate with theirs. I must charge you, however, with having left out one to whom you are perhaps more indebted than to the rest. On your part, don't forget to give my sincere regards to your Parents, and my warm wishes to the Romelli sisters. By the way, in a week's time I will send you a letter or two through Teresa Maccario who is going to your place that day; do me the kindness of handing them to the Romellis.

I am very glad to hear that you have written to your sister

Rachele. Before sending her a copy, I think it is better to keep her waiting for it for some time. However, I will write to her, too; I shall tell her about it, but enigmatically, and the same thing you must do, till we find out what she really wants, and then we shall send her the book as well, because these are things that should be treated with respect. Not to create confusion, let us do like this: any letters about this matter that you send to Rachele, let me have them first; I will read them and then forward them to her, and so I will know better what to write. And if you want me to let you first see my letters addressed to her, just drop me a hint and I will do as you say. So that is settled.

But what about the Babe who is waiting for Marianna and Bortolamea to go and keep him company in the crib? Shall we forget all about him? Oh no! Sister dear, let us not be ungrateful towards the most loveable Jesus who spared himself no pains for our salvation. During these days of Advent, that is, of preparation for the birth of Jesus, let us form in our own hearts a beautiful, cosy crib, where the dearly beloved Babe can rest quite comfortably. But how shall we adorn the crib of our heart? How? By means of self-denial, sobriety, prayer and meditation, by humility and fervour. These will be our decorations. And don't you think we should prepare an inn as less unworthy as possible for the coming of such a Guest? Or must we let souls less highly favoured than we are to offer Jesus a heart more ardent, chastened and humble than ours?

Oh no! That must never be! Let us at once get 'busy' and do what our loving Lord wants from us. Let us frequently go with our thought to the sacred Crib, and seek advice, now from Jesus, now from Mary, on what we can do. They will tell us to drop that vanity, to dress in a more sober way during this time, to mortify our taste in food or drink: that coffee, that fruit, that sweet, to drop that fun, however innocent, to deprive ourselves of some pleasure, though in itself allowed, to keep our eyes cast down in certain circumstances, to stop ourselves from saying that word, to forgive that wrong: in short, to seek to please Jesus and Mary. And then, how happy we shall be when evening comes and we have some little gift to offer them!

The dear Babe is pleased with even the tiniest things, and richly rewards them, too. Come on, then, dear Marianna, let us try to outdo each other in loving God. I am sure you will win, but it doesn't matter. I will at least try to compete with you, and your virtue will encourage me to love God ever more passionately.

There is something else you must let me suggest to you, and it is this: in all simplicity and confidence you could ask your Confessor permission to do some penance, for instance: one time to apply the discipline, another time to wear the penance chain, to fast once a week; more especially, ask him to let you receive Holy Communion at least twice a week on ferial days. Keep in mind that if you don't do this, you fail to do as our Lord desires. Ask him: if he says No, patience, but as

long as you don't ask anything, I know as much as you do that you will not get his permission.

You will at once see how happy you will be. Pay heed to a friend, or rather a sister, who is speaking for your good. Oh well! It's time for me to stop, because it is late at night, and my eyes are heavy with drowsiness.

Commend me earnestly to the Lord, I beg of you. See you again in Heaven and, before that, at the blessed cave of Bethlehem. Goodbye, dear Marianna.

December 1824.

Your loving Sister

BORTOLAMEA CAPITANIO

YEAR 1825

Letter 6

TO THE SAME

She apologizes for delay - News - She encourages her to perform practices of penance to make up for sinners' offences.

HAIL TO THE LOVE OF JESUS – AND ALSO THAT OF MARY

Beloved Sister,

Better late than never. I received both of your letters, but as usual, I was not prompt in answering them. My laziness got the better of me this time, too. However, I did carry out all your orders, and I will not fail to let you know as soon as they are carried out. Excuse my delay in writing, and to make up for this fault of mine, say to Mary on my behalf seven *Hail Marys* with arms outstretched, and we shall be friends again.

Fr Venanzio is no longer Confessor of the Nuns - a very sad thing for them, for himself and for me too. Before he left he told me to give you his wishes and to commend him earnestly to God. Do so, as he expects from you. Please pray also for Zitti, who is ill.

If you see or write to Romelli sisters, tell them I am waiting for an answer to two letters of mine, and give them my warm wishes.

I can make out from your last letter but one how sure you are of my love for Jesus; if you think it is a good thing, let my example encourage you to do the same. Whatever you do for Jesus' sake will have an eternal reward. You also have a Confessor who complies with your wishes: what else do you want? You lack nothing except good will, and it is up to you to have that. Regarding the discipline, I understood very well what has happened in your case. If he did say what you referred to me, it would be really funny. But you can be sure he spoke to you like that in order to see whether you knew what you were talking about. Try to ask him again, and if he puts the same sort of questions to you, tell him that it consists in flogging oneself with one's whole might as so many saints used to do. You will see that from that reply he will understand what it is. Remember that God expects some reparation for the offences he receives from sinners, and so put your whole fervour into it and go ahead.

Concerning Rachel, you may send her the pamphlet of the Sodality of Our Lady of Sorrows, since she is anxious to have it, it seems to me. Tell her that you are sending it to her at my request, recommend it to her and fill her with fervour, and then I shall write to her myself.

I say 'goodbye' because I must finish, for it is late in the night, and I feel very sleepy.

Don't forget in your prayers the one who is all the time teaching like a 'learned person' and a hypocrite Directress, that is,

Lovere, 21 January 1825.

Your unworthy Sister
CAPITANIO BORTOLAMEA

Letter 7

TO THE SAME

Spiritual consolation - In praise of vow of Chastity.

Dearest Beloved Sister,

Lovere, 26 March 1825.

First To be frank with you, I was wondering: my 'sister' Marianna must be in such *ecstatic delight*¹ that she forgot even to send for the books that she was so anxious for! Lucky that she is! Our Lord must be giving her comfort, and I am glad of it ... But in the meantime I was immersed in a most terrible tepidity, and I had a dreadful fear that my sweet Spouse might have abandoned me. Your fervour made me feel jealous and ashamed, and all I felt like doing was groaning under the burden of my coldness and indifference, when Mary, my dear, most loveable Mother, came forward to comfort this ungrateful and unworthy daughter with her usual delightful attention and She calmed me down. Let us heartily thank the Lord who draws us with such compassion to himself. Since he wants us to be wholly his, let us not resist but give ourselves to Him completely.

¹ Original in Latin: '*gaudeamus*'.

How happy we shall be at the point of death if we have served him faithfully all our life. Oh! How fearlessly we shall then embrace our Crucified Love if we have imitated him here on earth! Let us keep in mind that life is short, days pass swiftly by, pleasures slip away unnoticed, and what are we left with in the end? We are left with what we have done, good or bad, which we shall have to present to God to be judged by. Let us therefore start in earnest to love Jesus, practise Christian virtues, control our passions and, above all, live hidden from men's eyes to please God alone.

I cannot conceal from you a thought that has crossed my mind about you. It has occurred to me that in occasion of the parish Mission or before that, you may have made a vow of chastity - even if only for a certain period of time. If that is the case, oh! how happy and fortunate you must be! It would need the pen of an angel to describe the merits and privileges of this vow and how pleasing it is to God. Those who are called to it can be considered as the most fortunate that could be found not just on earth but also in Heaven.

To be frank with you, although I fall short in responding to such a remarkable grace, all the same, when I stop to reflect on this special favour, my heart overflows with an unbounded joy and there is kindled in my being a most ardent desire to respond to it also by doing good deeds. Be sure I will greatly appreciate it if you let me know about it yourself. I will be eagerly waiting to hear of it.

With regard to the Sacred Heart, I don't think I need to say anything, because I am sure the zealous Don Angelo Bosio will have told you enough about it. The booklets have not reached me yet; as soon as I get them I will let you know, so that you may ask someone to fetch them.

I am sending you Viganoni's books: if you don't mind, I am keeping the designs with me for a while, to trace out a copy of them. I will send them back to you next week.

My Parents acknowledge your wishes and reciprocate. Please give our sincere regards to your esteemed Parents and all our friends. Thank you very much for the wishes you sent me through Don Angelo Bosio. I appreciated them knowing that they were coming from a loving heart, and so I am grateful to you for them.

May the Lord our God bless you abundantly, always, but more especially in occasion of the Easter celebrations. With sincere wishes a thousand times over, till we meet again.

Your loving and loyal Sister
BORTOLAMEA CAPITANIO

Letter 8

TO THE SAME

She congratulates her on her vow of Chastity.

Dearly beloved Sister,

Romelli Sisters gave me your wishes. I greatly appreciated them because I understood by them that you do remember me. I am greatly indebted to you and be sure they will be fully reciprocated.

Would this affection for each other, at least, make of us both Saints by means of mutual admonishment, encouragement and advice!

I learn from your last letter of the special grace God has given you: do your best to profit from it, for this is a privilege that even Angels envy. I am at a loss for words to express the happiness that this news has brought me. I read it and reread it more than four times, and as I read it an inner joy flooded my whole being; I could not hold back my tears for the joy of it.

Dear Bride of Jesus, what must we do to respond to such love? Love can be returned only by love.

Let us then love our most gentle Spouse; let us continue to do our best to draw other souls to him. In your transport of love remember me because, to be frank with you, I feel close to making again some foolish mistake.

I am sending you the cloth and the cotton wool, the cost for which is Lire 2.9, and an extra $\frac{1}{4}$ of cotton wool for Romelli Sisters. If they want to know the price, it is Lire 1. I am telling you the price just for you to know: I don't expect you to send me the amount at once. Take your time about it, for I am glad to be at your service. I have already paid for the pamphlets I sent you: they cost one svanziga¹; This gives you an idea how much to charge in distributing them.

Keep me in your heart and consider me now and always.

Love, 22 April 1825.

Your loving and faithful Sister and Friend
BORTOLAMEA C.

¹ *Swanzig: a currency of Austria at that time.*

Letter 9

TO DON ANGELO BOSIO

Devotional practices for herself and friends.

Very Reverend Father Confessor,

A thousand thanks for the Relics you have lent us and for the trouble you have taken to write out for us the beautiful act of consecration to Mary. Mere thanks are not sufficient to pay my debt of gratitude for your kindness, and so I will implore the Blessed Virgin Mary to make up for what I owe you with her blessings and graces. As to the Relic that you had left me free to take, I am extremely obliged to you, Reverend Father, but I don't have the courage to do so; I feel it would be too bold of me to pick what seems best to me.

From among those who observed the practices for the month of Mary, I singled out several and distributed to them the Novena of the Sacred Heart. These, as far as I can judge, are the most virtuous and are eager to go on practising devotions, and so I gave them the Novena; though I had not spoken to you about it, I felt sure you would approve of it.

I am enclosing a paper on which I have written out a method of life which I intend to follow from now on; please cancel whatever you think unsuitable, and add what you find lacking. You will also find two notepapers with various practices of piety which I should like to observe throughout this novena and up to the Feast of the Assumption, always disposed to obey you, of course.

Regarding time for sleep, you had allotted 7 hours, but it appears that the Sacred Heart is not quite satisfied, because according to the lots drawn, he expects me to keep Him company from 1 a.m. to 2 a.m. and then again from 7 a.m. to 8 a.m., which leaves me with only five hours of sleep. However, if five hours is too little, I trust you will not fix more than six hours, not during this Novena, at least. I beg this of you. Commending myself earnestly to your prayer, and most gratefully expressing my humble respect and deep reverence towards you, I have the honour to be,

1st June 1825.

Your devoted Daughter in J. Christ
BORTOLAMEA CAPITANIO

Letter 10

TO MARIANNA VERTOVA

On love for Mary shown during the past month of May.

HAIL TO JESUS AND MARY

Dearest Sister,

Lovere, 3 June 1825.

As I am very sleepy, I shall write to you just a few lines to assure you that I received your kind letter. As I do not have the booklets you ask for, I have asked the book-seller, but he did not have them either. However, if you wish me to order them for you from Brescia, just drop me a hint, and I will do as you say. In the meantime, please excuse the delay.

I cannot help asking you about the month of Mary. With what fervour you must have spent it, Marianna dear? I can well imagine your sense of commitment and passionate love for Mary all through this sacred month dedicated to Her! How many beautiful acts you would have woven, all consisting of virtues to form the mystical Crown that was to be placed on the head of the noble Queen! Oh, how fortunate you are, how I envy you! – Mary will know how to reward you, as befits a Queen, especially by giving you new strength and vigour, so

that you may overcome the enemies of your eternal salvation with great forcefulness.

Oh yes; if it is a question of speaking about our most gentle Mother Mary, I do wish I had time and capacity to write about her greatness in order to encourage others to love her, since I myself unhappily fail to love her. But as I have neither one nor the other, I had better hold on to my desire. However, I earnestly recommend that you continue to love her and spread devotion to her.

Let me 'leave you' here, with the hope of meeting you soon and enjoying your company for a few days. Commend me very warmly to the Lord. With a loving kiss, and a thousand greetings from your sister.

Goodbye, goodbye.

Yours sincere Sister

CAPITANIO BORT.

To Very Esteemed Lady

MARIANNA VERTUA

MALEGNO.

Letter 11

TO THE SAME

*She ardently desires that they help each other in acquiring virtue -
Familiarity with St Aloysius.*

HAIL TO JESUS AND MARY – HAIL TO ALOYSIUS AND TERESA

Dearly beloved Sister,

Love, 17 June 1825.

As just a couple of lines in a hurry, because night is setting in and I have still to get ready for Lucia Romelli another letter, which I will enclose in yours: kindly pass it on to her.

The great desire I cherish, not just to see you but also to enjoy your company, is very great, but it seems to me that for me to come and see you is very difficult, and so, knowing that you return good for evil, I hope I will soon be favoured with a visit from you. I think this will considerably serve to encourage each other to love our most gentle Spouse more deeply, to detach ourselves from all worldly things, to practise Christian virtues suited to our state-in-life and, lastly, to advance in Christian perfection. This should be enough to drive your virtuous heart eagerly and speedily along this journey.

As to the booklets, I will order them as soon as possible, but it will take time, and so I beg you to have patience.

I earnestly commend myself to your prayers. Tuesday, Feast of St Aloysius Gonzaga, you are requested to give a kiss to that Saint on my behalf. Together with it you must remind him to grant me the grace he knows of. I wish you to have from Heaven all sorts of happiness and all sorts of troubles and tribulations, which will make you more like the One you have chosen for your Spouse. Goodbye, dearest.

Your Sister B.C.

Letter 12

TO GIULIA & LUCIA ROMELLI

Condolence and comfort after the manner of St Aloysius.

HAIL TO JESUS AND MARY

Dearly beloved Sisters and Friends,

As I had just sealed the letter - which I hope you have received by now - when your own welcome letter reached me. It brought me sorrow and at the same time also joy, but at that moment I did not know yet the cause of your profound grief. When I came to know of it, I could not restrain my tears, so deeply I was moved at the news. Poor as I am, I did not fail to commend you to God and to Mary. Have no doubt about it: they will never leave you alone. In fact, the less support we have from human means, the more visibly manifest will Divine providence and protection be.

May you be comforted by the thought of what our dear St Aloysius said when he was brought the news of his father's death: «God be praised. Now at least I can with more reason and with greater trust say the Our Father». You too can now with greater confidence turn to Jesus your Spouse and to Mary

your Mamma; death robbed you of your father and a man deprived you of your Mother, but no one can rob you of Jesus and Mary. Hold on to these and you will not come to a bad end.

Besides, what greater comfort can there be for you than that of bearing the sign of our Redemption? Giulia, that Cross you desired so earnestly: here it is. I appeal to you: hold it close to your heart with gladness, kiss it tenderly and with warm affection thank your Spouse who is enriching you with such precious gifts. Make it ever more precious by your patience, adorn it with gems of acceptance and bear it with great joy, for it is the very cross that will lead you to Heaven. Lucia, the Cross you cherish so deeply, the Cross that makes ever more perfect souls dear to God, here it is now presented to you. I appeal to you, accept it as the greatest of all the favours that God could ever grant to you. What could you have desired more deeply - than that of being like Jesus! ... like your most gentle Spouse?... Oh supreme happiness! Instead of considering yourself unfortunate and unhappy, you have reason to hold yourself as the most fortunate of all creatures, and you can heartily thank the Lord who has favoured you so highly.

My dearest friends, take heart. Your days of sorrow will soon come to an end, your days of joy will be eternal and in return for the suffering you are now enduring you will have a priceless reward in Heaven.

I have no doubt that humanly speaking, you will feel the Cross weighing heavily on you. Even I, in fact, was deeply distressed by it, and I could not even for a moment stop thinking of you and feeling sorry for you. And yet, deep down,

underlying that natural distress, my spirit found firm ground for hope and joy, and I am sure that the same thing will happen to you. Next week, or week after that, I hope I will be able to pay you a visit.

Meanwhile, love me still, and consider me as

Lovere, 25 June, 1825.

Your sincere Sister in J. C.

CAPITANIO BORTOLAMEA

Letter 13

TO DON ANGELO BOSIO

She sorrows over her pride.

Very Reverend Father Confessor,

2 a.m. (= 10 p.m.)¹ of 24 July 1825.

I am enclosing the usual note on my defects of pride. In this respect, I am always the same. I may not be regressing, but I am not improving either. I am at a point where I have almost lost hope of ever ridding myself of my dreadful, invincible pride. On the other hand, I am placing all my trust in my dear Mamma, and I shall earnestly pray to her till her compassionate heart will give in to my plea and she will give me holy Humility. May I avail myself of this opportunity to repeat my request for the Novena you know of. Believe me, I am truly ashamed to bother you in this way; I am also going against my nature, which is that of saying things once and then keep quiet, but this time I just cannot do that. Something, I know not what, is urging me to do it. Perhaps it is my pride which always tries to creep into everything, and just for that reason, maybe, Mary permits that you do not grant my request.

¹ At Bartolomea's time there was different way of counting the hours, starting from sunset.

This is very distressing to me because while I should like very much to do the Novena to give Mary a token of my gratitude, I realize that it is because of something in myself that you, Rev. Father, or rather Mary, is not letting you give me your permission to do it. Whatever it may be, I commend myself to your charity; do what you deem best for my poor soul, and that is all. Please don't mind if I am such a nuisance. It will not happen again; next time I will obey you promptly, and not insist so much. I beg you most earnestly to commend me to the Lord. You know already the great need my heart is in: that by itself is enough to appeal to your kindness and prevent you from forgetting.

Lest I should be too tiresome, I end here. Humbly revering you, and most gratefully, I have the honour to be

Your devoted Daughter in J. C.

BORTOLAMEA CAPITANIO

Letter 14

TO LUCIA & GIULIA ROMELLI

Delay in writing due to Mother's sickness.

HAIL TO JESUS AND MARY

Dearly beloved Sisters,

Just a moment robbed of the housework to spend it in sweet conversation with you, because for some time now my Mother has been ill. I imagine to hear you say: «Bortolomea has forgotten all about us. She promised to write to us, but as usual she did not keep her word». You are quite right; I would really take the blame for it if it had been a question of negligence and sheer laziness on my part. But the reason I have already mentioned should be enough to hold me excused. In any case, don't think I have forgotten you, my dear friends, no. That is not so, and you would do me wrong if you thought so. In fact, my dear 'little' Romelli sisters are always in my heart, in my mind and on my lips.

With regard to the Novena, Mary will have to be satisfied with what you have done for her, because I have asked for it more than once, and she has given me nothing.

I am sending you a *rocchetto*¹ given me by our beloved Nuns, and they told me to pay you a thousand compliments.

Give my sincere regards to Angelina and tell her that I keep her in my thoughts, and that I am sorry I did not send her my wishes the other time you were returning to your home town. I was rather confused, and that is why I failed to pay my respects. Please make up for it now by giving her a thousand wishes.

I beg you to commend me to God, because I need to obtain a grace that calls for your fervent prayers. May God's choicest blessings be on you. Embracing you lovingly, I am,

Love, 6 August 1825.

Your grateful Friend

BORTOLAMEA C.

To Distinguished Ladies

Sisters LUCIA & GIULIA ROMELLI

(with a parcel)

CIVIDATE.

¹ *'rocchetto': 'rochet' a special liturgical vestment for bishops.*

Letter 15

TO MARIANNA VERTOVA

She mentions a fever she has had - She suggests tactful methods in conducting Pious Union meetings - She congratulates her on the vow of Chastity.

HAIL TO JESUS & MARY

Dearly beloved Sister,

I seem to see you, Marianna, looking a bit cross with your Bortolamea, because over and above failing to explain what I should have explained as you too desired, I have not, in the meantime, answered your beautiful letter. Make peace with me, because it was Jesus who arranged everything, not I. For just a few days, yes, but with high fever, I was ill in bed and so I could not carry out my duty nor attend to your wishes. However, now that I am better, I will do so most gladly.

What you charge me with, I do deserve, but you could have said even more rightly that I am proud, holding myself precious and expecting to be asked again and again. Oh well! Charity is above all. And so, limited though my own capacity is, I will give you a few hints on what I think appropriate for your Pious Union. «Continue to assign to them week by week the particular virtue they have to practice, as you usually do.

Every month give them also a Saint - man or woman saint as a Protector - with some prayer in the Saint's honor To train them in some concrete practice, start with the Novena, but have it in writing, yourself choosing a few easy practices, which will not be tiresome. Divide the whole Union into three or four groups, and put at the head of each group one of the most virtuous who is also capable of leading the group.

To these three or four girls give a copy of the Novena practices (you will have to take the trouble of writing out three or four copies) and indicate to each of the leaders the number and also which girls you entrust to her care. Recommend them warmly to her care; tell her to see if they are seriously-committed, discreet, devout, obedient and, in short, if they carry out what you propose to them.

Make her also read out the novena practices to the girls of her group every day, which will serve to remind them and encourage them to follow them. In your Sunday meeting, make the leaders report on their group and you, with apt recommendations, kindle in their hearts love for piety and devotion. If the Novena is done smoothly you could give them a card¹ with new assignments, every month. Following the same method, give them a simple method of life suited to their life-situation, and have it read out every month». This is all that I can suggest to you at the moment.

¹ A paper distributed among the members with assignment of devout practices and acts of virtue to be done for a fixed time or period.

If you write to me on the results of this much, I have in mind various other things which you may like and find useful. That is, at least, what I hope. For the time being what I have told you is enough, because we cannot do everything at once.

Let us now pass from the Plural to the Singular. Allow me to congratulate you, as indeed I should, on the extraordinary grace you received from the goodness of God on the Feast of the glorious Assumption of Mary.

Dear friend and beloved sister, you must let my heart speak out: don't you think it is a high dignity to be the Bride of Jesus? A daughter of Mary in a twofold sense ... Daughter, Handmaid and Bride of a God! ... Oh what a favour of incomparable greatness. Do rejoice, rejoice greatly, for you have every reason to do so, since you are now a thousand times more fortunate than any great queen that has ever lived on earth. I seem to see you already radiant with happiness, seeking in every manner to please your most pure Spouse; you must have already by now made great progress in perfection. Blessed are you, and yet you must realize that you can never do as much as He deserves. The Lord has granted this grace to me as well, and I consider it almost the greatest of all; but I misuse it. I beg you to pray much for me that I may not be unfaithful to my God who, without minding my misery and lowliness, has showered me with special graces to the point of making me his bride. I will do the same for you, so that after loving and serving our beloved Lord here on earth, both of us together may go to enjoy him for all eternity in Heaven.

I beg you to offer a Holy Communion for a very special need of mine; in due time I will let you know what it is; just now I cannot because it is a secret.

I have one favour to ask of you: by Saturday, if you can, kindly send me the little sum of money you owe me; I must spend it on something which I don't want my Parents to know about. At the moment I don't have enough money for the thing: that is why I am asking this favour from you, if it is not a big trouble for you. Please don't mind. Use my services freely. All those who know you were happy to have your wishes, and reciprocate hundredfold. My Parents do the same. If you meet Romelli sisters, give them my best wishes and tell them that I will soon answer their letter. Don't forget to tell them why I am so late in writing to them.

This time my letter is long enough to make up for the short ones in the past.

I beg you, for charity's sake, to make your girls say three *Hail Marys* for me. Goodbye, beloved of the Lord; remember also the one who most happily declares to be

Lovere, 27 August 1825.

Your loving and grateful Sister
BORTOLAMEA CAPITANIO

To Distinguished Lady
MARIANNA VERTOVA
MALEGNO.

Letter 16

TO THE SAME

Expressions of affection - of humility - Advice and holy skills for conducting a Pious Union for girls.

HAIL TO THE MOST LOVEABLE SPOUSE JESUS

HAIL TO THE MOST BELOVED MAMMA MARY

My dear Sister,

I have received all your letters. I alone have been too lazy to write. That is because I counted on your goodness of heart, which made me hope you would forgive me. Nor do I feel ready to promise that I will mend my ways, because it is an incorrigible defect of mine, and nothing less than the heroic patience of my little Marianna is needed to put up with it. You must know, however, that I do care for you very much. In fact, the less I write to you, the more I love to think of you. I trust this is sufficient to assure you of my sincere affection for you.

Before I speak of anyone else, I should like to beg of you, who are so fervent, to commend me to Almighty God.

I wish I could let you see the sorry state of my soul: it would surely move you to say a prayer for me now and then. Only God and my Confessor know how badly I am in need of prayer and so, for charity's sake, commend me to God.

I was very happy to hear that you, with the girls entrusted to your spiritual care, have carried out the Novena of the Holy Rosary so well. Keep up your courage, dear Marianna. God is extremely delighted with your keen desire to draw souls to Him, and He must have reserved a great reward for you. If you succeed in drawing just one 'tiny' soul to Heaven, will it not by itself win you great glory? And if you are granted to draw them all to Heaven, and in that blessed City see them all around you, forming your mystical crown of glory, what will your joy be? And so, with new vigour and fresh fervour, resume the practice of this virtue which is so pleasing to God. If you agree with me, I think you would do well to let them continue to keep up some little practice every month. Your girls are all big, it is true. But they are all eager to learn and so you can do whatever you wish with them.

Concerning the person you want to restore to her former fervour, go to the Blessed Mary, go to Her with great trust and earnestly pray that She may kindle love in your own heart first, so that you may kindle love in the hearts of others. Have no fear. Mary will not let you down; she will do it as only she is able to. On your part, do your very best. I too am enclosing three cards that you can use as a guide. You say that you are

not good at drawing up a list of practices suitable for the girls entrusted to your care. I will tell you at once how to do it. Before you start to write, pray to the Holy Spirit to enlighten you, and ask Mary to dictate what She wishes. Then, according to the inspiration you get, go ahead and write: this will surely be fitting for your girls. You will be doing me a big favour if you keep me informed, and if you think I am able to do anything useful, don't hesitate to ask. Please let me know if the parish priest you were waiting for turned up, and also if you go to him for Confession and if he readily agrees to what you desire. Tomorrow I shall go to get you "*Via della salute*"¹. I will send it to you with this letter if it is still there, for I am not sure of finding it. As to the booklets on the Sacred Heart, I will do my best to get them, but it will not be easy. I will send your notebook next time I write to you, because I have not yet finished copying it. Another thing I have to tell you is that I have received the two Svanziche²: I don't know what you had actually owed me; if you know it, please let me know how much I owe you back. Just for you to know, regarding the money I lent you to buy a book which I think belonged to Romelli sisters: they have not yet sent the money to me according to what you and I had agreed they would do. I am not telling you this so that you may tell them that I am waiting for the money, but that you may know how things stand. I think that is all I wanted to tell you, and my eyes are heavy with drowsiness. So let me end with a loving kiss. I nearly forgot to

¹ *'Journey of salvation', title of a spiritual book.*

² *See footnote pg 29.*

ask you to let Lucia have her letter enclosed herewith. I wrote it two weeks ago and have not yet had an opportunity to send it to her.

Once again, Goodbye, sister dear.

Lovere, 30 September 1825.

Yours loving Sister
BORTOLAMEA future Sr.
PACIFICA CAPITANIO

To Honourable
MARIANNA VERTOVA
MALEGNO.

Letter 17

TO MARIA DÒ

Desire to see her.

Dearly beloved Friend,

Lovere, 1st October 1825.

I think it is my duty to send you a couple of lines, eager as I am to have news of you. I suppose all is well with you, yet I would be happy to be reassured by a letter from you.

I need not explain to you in so many words my great desire to see you and enjoy your company, because if you just think how much I care for you, this will by itself make you realize how anxious I am to see you.

If it depends on you, I should beg you to fulfil this desire of mine by returning soon to us, but as a 'daughter of obedience' you are bound to do what you are told, and so I will limit myself to telling you that you will make me very happy when I will have the joy of seeing you.

Kindly convey sincere regards and compliments to all at home,

in particular to Rev. Fr. Stefano, on behalf of my parents as well.

Commend me to God and consider me, as I sincerely have the honour to be

Your loving Friend and Companion

BORTOLAMEA CAPITANIO

P.S. Pay my profound respects to your
Parish Priest.

To Esteemed Lady

DÒ MARIA

MONTECCHIO.

Letter 18

TO LUCIA & GIULIA ROMELLI

Yearning for Heaven.

HAIL TO JESUS AND MARY

Dearly beloved Sisters and Friends,

Joy filled my heart to overflowing when I was unexpectedly graced by a visit from your good and gentle Mother, all the more so when I heard that she had been with you. I could well imagine the happy days you would have had together, and I was really glad of it. Our compassionate Lord never gives us any cross without sending some refreshing strength to make it bearable. May He be praised for ever. Amen.

Dear friends, the Solemnity of All Saints is over already. I can imagine how great your gladness must have been in contemplating such a multitude of Saints who are awaiting the happy day when you too will share in their blessedness. Oh! How empty worldly pleasures become at the thought of Heaven! Let the worldly-minded keep to themselves the things of this world; we have no wish to share in them, for our gaze is fixed on that dear homeland where our good God and heavenly Spouse is wholly intent on being the delight of his beloved brides. How greatly we shall rejoice, dear Sisters,

when we shall meet again in Heaven! Who of us will have the happy lot to be there first? O God, how comforting it is to keep such sweet realities in mind! And if the very thought of them brings us so much comfort, how will it be for us to be really there enjoying them! Our hearts will overflow with happiness while we are led to adore and behold the face of our most gentle Spouse! And when for the first time we shall see and recognize Mary, our dear Mamma, what we shall do? We shall surely be beside ourselves with bliss when we greet the beloved St Aloysius with all the other Saints that we now venerate! Ah! All this must be more precious than all other things, and so it is worthwhile to make every effort to win it. Please help me with your prayers and good advice, and I will do the same for you, so that after loving one another so much here on earth, we may love one another for all eternity in Heaven!

I have said my three *Hail Marys* for Lucia, but I expect three more from both of you. I have received the money and your letter; I did not answer at once because I had various things to write, and these took away all my free time. Please excuse me. Tell lady Angelina that I have greatly appreciated her wishes, and that I warmly thank her for keeping me in her thoughts. Give her my sincere regards. Best wishes also to Bernardina.

Goodbye, dearest sisters. Love me still and think of me as
Lovere, 6 November 1825.

Your loving, grateful Sister and Friend

BORTOLAMEA CAPITANIO

Letter 19

TO MARIANNA VERTOVA

Preparing for the Cross.

HAIL TO JESUS & MARY

Dearly beloved Sister,

Love, 20 November 1825.

I am very sorry I could not see to your needs sooner. I had to attend to too many things at the same time, and so I could not put my mind well to yours, so please have patience with me. I am now enclosing the Oratorio¹ rules and the book, the cost of which you will find marked on it. I am also sending you the booklets on the Sacred Heart, costing a Svanzica², as usual. I am glad to know you have had a smooth journey. May God bless you always, in everything: that is my heartfelt wish for you. My father gave your wishes to your Uncle. He warmly appreciated them and was very glad to have news of you.

Dear Sister, our gentle Spouse expects something special from us, something great, and so let us prepare our heart to receive his graces. Let us implore Mary, our dear Mamma, that She herself may prepare it as she knows best.

¹ *'Oratorio': in the pastoral tradition of the churches in North Italy, it is a place adjacent to the parish church in which the youth are gathered for catechism and other similar activities.*

² *See footnote pg 29.*

Maybe this grace will be a heavy Cross. Let us show ourselves to be quite happy to partake in some way of the adorable Cross of our most gentle and loveable Spouse. Oh, how blessed shall we be if we could always live crucified with Him! What profit we would derive for our soul! Let us then pray our beloved Jesus to give us a real love for suffering; pray earnestly that I may have it too, since this love for suffering is something I lack very badly. – I earnestly commend to you the girls you care spiritually about. Let them mean much to you, for they will be of great glory to you in Heaven. Please ask them to say three *Hail Marys* for my intention.

My Parents send you their warm wishes, and so do our friends. Convey to your Parents my wishes with those of mine.

I leave you in the sweet Heart of Jesus. May you there contemplate his Love and be yourself set afire with love.

Goodbye, dearly beloved. I am

Your faithful and loving Sister

BORTOLAMEA CAPITANIO

To Kind and Worthy (Patron) Lady

MARIANNA VERTOVA

MALEGNO.

Letter 20

TO BARTOLOMEA DÒ

She asks her to forward a parcel to Don Angelo Bosio.

Gracious Friend,

I have a favour to ask from you. Next Monday I shall hand to Colombo a parcel meant for Don Angelo Bosio. I will tell him to leave it at Casino. I would be very much obliged if you could go and fetch it and forward it, or take it as soon as possible to Don Angelo. I trust you will kindly do me this favour; excuse me for the trouble.

Give my best wishes to everyone at home. To you I give the wishes of your sister and of my relatives.

The bearer of this note is here with me; not to keep him waiting for it, I stop here.

Lovere 17 December 1825.

Your loving and grateful Friend

BORTOLOMEA CAPITANIO.

P.S. In case you don't find the parcel on Monday, it will most probably be there by Tuesday. If you don't mind the trouble, kindly do me the same favour again.

To Esteemed Miss

BORTOLOMEA DÒ

MONTECCHIO.

Letter 21

TO MARIANNA VERTOVA

Devout practice for Christmas Night and Octave to be performed with other friends - She refers to what God expects from her friend.

LET OUR HEART BE EVER ARDENT
WITH LOVE OF JESUS AND MARY

My gracious Sister,

I was extremely glad to have your letter. My eyes filled with tears of consolation as I saw how greatly you love our Divine Spouse. Since I myself fail to love him, He has at least others who love him, as he rightly deserves.

But what shall we do, dear Marianna, during Christmas Night, now so near? How happy should we be to see Him here among us ... But shall we bear to see him lying on prickly straw? Inside a stable, shivering in the cold, whimpering and crying? Oh no! Let us without delay offer him our hearts to dwell in, and since (mine at least) is worse than the stable where he was born, let us do like this: let us ask St Aloysius

and our Guardian Angel to go on an escapade in Heaven and rob Mary of her Sacred Heart and lend it to us. With that Heart in our chest I am sure Baby Jesus will be able to rest quite happily.

I suggest we do one thing together, on Christmas Night itself and throughout the Octave, not just with me but also with the Romelli sisters to whom I am writing the same thing, and so all four of us will be one in spirit.

At twelve sharp, midnight, we shall go in spirit, straight to the stable of Bethlehem, and there beg Mary to open the door for us and let us in, and then place us close to her. We shall thank her for welcoming us and then profoundly adore Jesus himself. We shall then give him a kiss, you for me and I for you, and we shall offer him our heart with all the good deeds we have done during Advent. We shall ask Mary to purify our hearts and remove all the imperfections clinging to our good deeds, and adding to them her own merits, so that Jesus may be happy to receive us. Then we shall make an hour or even more of Meditation on the Sacred Mystery, and earnestly pray Jesus for one another to grant us his love with all those virtues that render his Brides most pleasing in his sight.

We shall not come away from the place without receiving exceptional graces. Above all, let us pray hard for poor sinners and for the Holy Souls of Purgatory.

Anything else you do, do it also for me. I'll do the same for you.

During the Octave, together with Romelli Sisters, we have drawn lots to be together in twos: M. Vertova with Giulia Romelli, Lucia Romelli with Bortolomea. One day each one of the two will be the Angel and the other the Shepherd. The one who plays the part of the Angel will go in spirit nine times to the Sacred Crib and each time ask for herself and for her Shepherd-companion a particular grace; the Shepherd will also pay nine spiritual visits to the Crib, each time taking with him a lovely act of virtue, done after the last visit and will offer it to Jesus for herself and for her Angel-companion. We shall start on Christmas Day: on that day M. Vertova will be the Shepherd and Giulia the Angel, and the same for the two of us: Lucia will be the Angel and I the Shepherd. On the second day you will take the Angel's part and Giulia will take the Shepherd's part, and so too Lucia will be the Shepherd and I the Angel. And so on till the end of the Octave. If you like the idea, that's how it is. I felt inspired to do like that, and I did so. God is often pleased to make his will known to the least of all, so that he may let his power shine out more visibly.

Dear Marianna, pray earnestly to God for a thing that He wants from you; ask him to let you know his Holy Will; on my part I will as soon as possible explain to you what I feel in this respect.

Tomorrow I will go and see if the things you ordered are ready, and send them to you with this letter. I will also enclose a note on the expenses incurred.

I cannot send you the Beads yet, because Don Angelo is away; he is at Erbanno, preaching during the (Parish) Mission.

Bosio sisters send you their best wishes, and so too my relatives and all our other friends.

God be with you, dearest. We shall 'meet' again at the stable of Bethlehem.

Your loving Sister and Friend
CAPITANIO BORTOLAMEA

Lovere, 22 December 1825.

P.S. Please give my sincere regards to your parents and to Miss Marietta.

Very urgent
To Esteemed Lady
MARIANNA VERTOVA
MALEGNO.

Letter 22

TO LUCIA ROMELLI

Outbursts of passionate love of God - Devotional practice for Christmas Night and Octave for herself and friends.

MAY OUR HEART BE AFIRE WITH THE SWEET LOVE
OF JESUS AND MARY

Dearly beloved Sister,

Nothing less than your letter was needed to revive the fire that was almost dying out in me, I mean the fire of love I should have for my beloved Jesus. I am deeply obliged to you; I thank you most sincerely for it. And I too, before Holy Christmas arrives, I am writing to you to urge myself as well as you (though you don't need it at all) to spend that day in a holy manner and draw profit also for the following days. Sister dear, how right you are in saying that it sounds impossible for a creature of God, one favoured with so many graces, to live and not die out of love at the sight of all that Jesus does for her! ... And yet, Oh! human ingratitude, how far you can go! ... To the extent of forgetting all about God who created you, redeemed you, keeps you in existence, one who for your sake was born in poverty, scorned, forsaken, and who in the end died in terrible pain on the infamous wood of the Cross! That is

how I should upbraid myself. But how long, O God, how long shall I remain so ungrateful to your love?... When will I once for all stop offending you and start loving you from my heart? ... I beg you, grant that I start right now; too long have I delayed, but now I will no longer put it off, not even for an instant. At this moment, yes, right now, I consecrate myself to you, and from now on I will not consider myself as my own possession but as something belonging entirely to you.

My dear Lucia, it is now long since we together consecrated ourselves to God, but in my ingratitude I took back what I had given Him. However, now that I am once more His, (or so I hope), I beg you to keep me mindful of the obligations we have towards our most loving Spouse, and at the same time to help me keep them by your prayer and timely reminders. On Christmas Night especially, in addition to what I wrote to Giulia, which I meant to be for you as well, I should like to do a few more things together with you.

This is what I have in mind: On entering, in spirit, into the sacred Stable, we take our place at Mary's side: immediately after that, we shall first bow down in adoration before the heavenly Baby and then lovingly kiss his feet, you for me and I for you.

We shall then offer him our heart and present to Him once more the few good deeds performed during this Advent Time, with a prayer to Mary to purify our heart and remove from our deeds all imperfection and adding to them her own merits so

that they may be more pleasing to the dear Babe. After that, we shall for an hour or more meditate on this Mystery, and earnestly pray for one another to Jesus that He may kindle in our heart the ardent flame of love for Him, and give us the whole outfit of virtues that a true Bride should have.

We shall not come out of that holy place till after we have received some special grace; in particular, we shall have sinners in mind: we shall do our very best to snatch away from the Devil's hands some soul and hand it over to the Child Jesus, praying that through the merits of the tears he shed in this Hut, he might grant to that soul his Grace and eternal life.

We shall not forget the souls in Purgatory. We shall tell Jesus that it is a great pity that on such a happy day there should be Brides of his, as all souls of Purgatory are, who suffer, and that to them too he might apply the fruits of his Redemption and make them at once go to Heaven.

Whatever else you do, do it also for me, and the same thing I will do for you. During the Octave we shall together do another thing. I mean everything with Giulia as well, and to work it out still better, we shall also have Marianna with us. This evening I am writing to her and tell her the same thing I am now telling you as to what she must do. We shall split into two pairs: on drawing lots, there came off Marianna with Giulia and Lucia with me. On alternate days one of the two will play the part of the Angel and the other of the Shepherd: nine times during the day we shall go to the Crib; each time the Angel will ask a

grace for himself and for his companion the Shepherd; each time the Shepherd will take to Jesus an act of virtue, whatever it may be, provided it has been done in between their last visit and the visit in which it is offered. This means that on such days the Shepherd has to do nine acts of virtue and offer them to Baby Jesus for himself and for the Angel. We shall change parts day by day. Not to get mixed up I will tell you who starts first. On Christmas Day Marianna will be the Shepherd and Giulia the Angel, and on the same day Lucia will be the Angel and I the Shepherd. On the second day, Marianna will be the Angel and Giulia the Shepherd, and similarly, Lucia will be the Shepherd and I the Angel. We shall proceed like this till the end of the Octave. If you like it, that's how it goes.

Dear Lucia, our Lord puts us together in everything: would that it be so in Heaven as well, one at the right side of St Aloysius and one on his left! May it be a thing pleasing to God!

Misses Bosio reciprocate your wishes, and with them my Parents and Camilla as well. I would have liked to write more, but I lack both paper and time. And so I take leave of you here, my dear sister and friend. I shall wait for you at the Stable of Bethlehem.

Yours sincere Sister and Friend

CAPITANIO BORTOLAMEA

Very urgent

To Esteemed Lady

LUCIA ROMELLI

CIVIDATE.