



## and you too **do** likewise

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**Sr. Carmela Paloschi**

*«I will constantly keep in mind those who are in the greatest need, either because they have no-one to keep an eye on them, or because of the moral danger they are in, because of the evil inclinations they are overruled by, or because of their lively character. To these, in a special way. I will consider myself a Mother»<sup>1</sup>.*

### «I was in prison...»

***Penal Institutes for «Pericolanti, Penitenti, Carcerate»***

*(Part I)*

The sisters did not know yet about the desires of the Foundress nor of her ‘testamentary’ words, which were discovered and published only later; however, they were deeply inspired by the inborn charism of Foundation and were responsibly aware of the youth question which, also at that time, was a crucial social situation, hence they did not hesitate to dedicate themselves with motherly spirit and common sense as true educators in order to rescue the *pericolate* (young girls in moral danger but willing to change their life), *pericolanti* (girls of bad ways, astray), *penitenti* (young women who repent and change their ways), *carcerate* (prisoners).

### «RICOVERO DELLE CONVERTITE», IN BERGAMO

On **1 June 1838**, yielding to the continual appeals from Bergamo and from Rev. Angelo Bosio as an expression of God’s will, Sr. V. Gerosa accompanied Sr. Fedele Giudici to Bergamo – in

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<sup>1</sup> B. CAPITANIO, *Scritti Spirituali*, Modena 1904, III, 164-165.

Borgo Santa Caterina, 41, to run the «Ricovero delle Convertite», an institute opened in 1533 by St Girolamo Emiliani, which at the beginning provided lodging for married women leading a shady life. The situation was difficult because of the unruly behaviour of the young girls (the number was always from 20 to 30), but also because of the presence of a lay Directress of a rather odd temperament, who was later on replaced. However, although Sr. Fedele was only 24 years old and alone, she was able to deserve the respect and the confidence of the young girls. She managed to obtain from the Directress the freedom to act in order to help the girls. In 1841 two sisters, a teacher and a cook, joined her to help her rehabilitate the young women.

A quotation taken from a report (no date nor place is given) by Earl Leonino Secco-Suardo, Head of the Managing Committee of the «Istituto delle Traviate», addressed to Sr. Vincenza, states: «The work of the sisters in caring for the rehabilitation of the inmates is having extraordinarily-good results. In the humble house of the *convertite* the sisters are doing a healing and a beneficial action, and above all, it is blessed by God. This healing action is not limited to the time of their stay in the Institute, but it continues afterwards and they give proof of this through their steady and hard working life»<sup>2</sup>. The sisters do unpaid work; the relationships are regulated by the Chairman of the «Ospizio delle donne in ritiro» (Home for secluded women) and the Superior General of the Sisters in Milan; the first Convention dates back to 1937 (hundred years after the foundation), signed by the Head Officer of the Institution and by the Superior General Sr. Maria Antonietta Sterni.

In the letters, which are in the archives of the Generalate, it is often stated that «the sisters sent for the home management of the family of the secluded women, have the essential qualities, and they fully meet the desires of this Management»<sup>3</sup>. But in 1879, after

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<sup>2</sup> A. PREVEDELLO, *L'Istituto delle Suore di carità*, Venezia, 1933, I, 56-57.

<sup>3</sup> Letter by the Chairman L. Secco Suardo to the esteemed and Reverend Vincenza Gerosa, superior of the Convent of the Sisters of Charity in Lovere, Bergamo, 28 April 1845, Prot. No. 230/188 and to the Reverend Angelo Bosio, Prevost of Lovere, Bergamo, 28 April 1845, Prot. No. 230/190, in AGSdC, 411/F.

nearly thirty years of loving and patient service done by the Sisters, our Institute advances detailed requests: «...due to the uncommonly high mortality rate going on, since some time ago, among the members of the Family of the Sisters of Charity, Rev. Mother General, on the advice of skilful doctors, would have established that the sisters should nourish themselves with good food according to the physical structure of each one. Moreover, instead of the food provided by the food board, an annual sum of money £ 500 is to be paid to every sister; including in this sum every and any eventual allowance in money, or in goods, which is currently added to the remuneration for each sister»<sup>4</sup>. Mother General's care for the health of the sisters is evident; besides, she makes a clear distinction between charity and justice.

The sisters treated the inmates entrusted to their care in this *Ospizio* (charitable institution) with great zeal, affection and dedication. In fact, on 14 March 1934 Sr. Maria Speranza, Directress of the Institution, dares to write to the «Honourable Board» stating that «it would be convenient to give a less humiliating name to this House, improperly called 'Ospizio Donne in Ritiro' (Home for secluded Women) known as 'delle Convertite'. In reality – Sister continues with motherly love – the major part of our inmates are *figliole traviate* (young girls led astray) but brought by divine Providence to this *asilo* (shelter) of peace so as to be helped and guided to moral rehabilitation, through the awakening of the Christian faith and the duties it demands... several girls feel embarrassed – when they manage to settle in the new family as brides and mothers – to mention the name of the institute where they come from, even though they keep sweet memories of it in their hearts... Therefore, I take the liberty of telling you what I think: I wish that in the very near future it be called '**Istituto Divin Redentore**'»<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Letter by the serving sister (superior) Sr. Monica Sianesi, on behalf of Mother Sr. Teresa Bosio, to the Honourable Council of the Institute «Donne in ritiro», Bergamo, 26 November 1879, *ibidem*.

<sup>5</sup> Letter (including administrative documentation) sent by Directress Sr. Maria Speranza Chiesa to His Majesty's Administration Ministry, on 16 August 1934, *ibidem*.

On 7 November of the same year, at 2 pm, the Delegate brought the commemorative inscription with the new name: It was truly «a memorable and dear day».

The Home's disciplinary Regulations of 1875<sup>6</sup> establish the type of girls to lodge and how to keep them engaged during the day: «This institution gives lodging to poor women of the city and of the Province of Bergamo as well as to the *pericolate*. In order to be accepted, they have to be willing to lead a good and peaceful life and to present a written application. Hospitality is offered to single and to married women, who should not be over thirty years, healthy in body and mind, and willing to do any kind of work...» (Art. 1); «All the inmates without any distinction are obliged to offer their service and their collaboration in the housework and all household needs... regarding work commissioned by private citizens, the Directress will distribute it in accordance with the abilities and physical strength of every inmate, maybe as a reward or punishment» (Art. 10.11); «Four fifths of the product of the work will go for the benefit of the inmates and the other fifth will remain for the profit of the Institution» (Art. 24).

The set purpose of the Institute is the moral rehabilitation of the girls, therefore, the basic features of the Regulations are disciplinary, as it is stated: «In case the inmates infringe the home regulations it rests with the Directress to take action:

- a) to admonish the offender before the community.
- b) In case of major emergency, the isolation of the inmate should not be longer than two days and a report is to be given to the Delegate of the Council who alone has the power to deal out major forms of punishment.
- c) In the case of serious misconduct with scandal, after having applied all the means at her disposal, the Directress has to draft a report to the Board who will decide on disciplinary measures and, if it is the case, also for the dismissal of the inmate from the *ospizio* (Art. 12).

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<sup>6</sup> Home Disciplinary Regulations of the «Ospizio delle Donne in ritiro», Bergamo, Editing Press Colombo, 1875, in AGSdC, 411/G.

This is a social (an exterior) norm, a question of behaviour which is, however, vivified by the charitable work of the sisters.

Relations among the inmates are strictly controlled and the duty of the superior is very delicate; when they talk to each other, the girls use the '*lei*' form (which is used with outsiders or important persons); they do not call each other by name but by their surname; they are not allowed to talk about their past life, about themselves, about their home-town, nor to tell anything in confidence to one another. Therefore, they are not allowed to have pencils, pens or paper. When they write to their family, they do so in the office of the superior and in her presence; the superior reads the incoming mail to the girl concerned and afterwards the superior withdraws the mail. They wear a dark uniform, long, heavy stockings and clogs. Most of them keep braided hair forming a crown around their head, they speak Italian with difficulty; they always work in silence.

Several men, over thirty, come to the institute to look for a marriageable girl; the superior examines them and, after having prayed, she presents the girl she thinks best for him. If the two agree, the meetings will be allowed every Sunday until they decide to get married.

The atmosphere of the building is oppressive. Modifications have been made at the insistence of the sisters more than at the bidding of the Administration<sup>7</sup>.

The Regulations do not say anything about the formation of the girls except what is said in Art. 16: «The inmates will be given instruction or trained, besides the housework, also in writing, reading, accounts and religious doctrine». Nor is there any plan of an educational method. The superior and the sisters provide for all the rest: they do their best to create a serene atmosphere, close to that of a family; they relate with the girls with much love, farsightedness and discretion, giving proof of patience, understanding, and self-sacrifice, as a mother would do. Unexpectedly the Adminis-

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Report of Sr. Candida Gazzaniga, Milan, 14 December 1959, in AGSdC, 411/H.

tration starts looking for qualified personnel provided with diplomas and demanding evidence of their proficiency... and so our service ceases on **7 July 1962**. The president Dr. Enzo Zambetti writes to the Superior Sr. Fernanda Mariani: «I would like to express my personal regret and that of the Administrative Board for the circumstances that have led to the termination of such devoted and tireless service, carried out for many years by this praiseworthy Order, at the 'Istituto Divin Redentore'. To you and to your sisters I extend my grateful acknowledgment for all the merits deserved in the moral uplifting and reintegration of so many girls into society ...I beg you to graciously accept the pledge of my deep, sincere esteem»<sup>8</sup>.

#### **«STABILIMENTO DELLA BEATA VERGINE MARIA ADDOLORATA», IN MILAN (INSTITUTION OF OUR LADY OF SORROWS)**

«...knowing the zeal and benefit with which, these Reverend Sisters of yours dedicate themselves to do all the works of mercy, I turn to your motherly care to ask you, Most Reverend Mother, to send two of your sisters to Milan to attend to the condition of the poor girls *pericolate e ravvedute* (astray, repentant girls) lodging in this *Pio Istituto*»; with these courtly words, for us today, but simple and sincere for the sender, the pro-tempore Chairman of the Institute of the «Beata Vergine Addolorata» and President of the «Pia Unione di Beneficenza» (pious union of charity), Marquis Ermete Visconti, writes on 4 January 1842 to Mother Superior of the Sisters of Charity in Lovere. Meantime, Sr. Vincenza Gerosa receives the request of sisters for the «Ciceri» Hospital; with the letter of 11 February to the Marquis Visconti and on the 16 February to Rev. Prevost N. Biraghi, she promises six sisters, four for the hospital and two for the *Pio Luogo*, although affirming, as she usually used to do «I am aware of the honour it would be for us, but I cannot forget our littleness. Therefore, not to venture on a

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<sup>8</sup> Letter by the Chairman to the Superior, Bergamo, 2 July 1962, in AGSdC, 411/F.

hard enterprise I intend, later on, to send two sisters<sup>9</sup> for an on-the-spot investigation». Then she submits the proposal's resolution to Card. Archbishop of Milan, Karl Kaietan von Gaisruck, whom she already considers «as father and master» although, subject to the agreement of the Bishop of Brescia, Mgr Carlo Domenico Ferrari, the diocese to which the foundation in Lovere belongs to, according to the usual procedure<sup>10</sup>. A sense of inadequacy, trust in God and in the sisters fills the soul of Sr. V. Gerosa who, along with Rev. Bosio, writes to the Bishop of Brescia: «This Congregation of ours has already thought about the subjects (sisters) to be sent to such *Pie Opere*, and although the sisters are not so perfect as much as we would wish, I dare also tell you that they are quite fit and this helps me to have hope of a good success. The purpose is good and surely God will assist them with his help»<sup>11</sup>.

On 8 April the Administrator Marquis E. Visconti urges Rev. A. Bosio to send the sisters as soon as possible, saying: «However, let them come as soon as possible: their coming will certainly not be as soon as I earnestly desire it to be especially for the Institute 'Beata Vergine Addolorata' where I am in urgent need. For Heaven's sake be quick in satisfying me, dear Reverend Archpriest... the season invites travel, and *qui cito dat bis dat* (he who gives soon gives twice). On **22 April 1842** two teachers, Sr. Francesca Bosio and Sr. Giulia Gerosa, «with a little practice of assistance to the sick because the nature of our institute was such that there were often sick people at home»; they were also willing to stay in the dormitories with the girls who needed an ever watching eye according to the request of the Management (4.1.1842); they started the service of charity – management, assistance and instruction – with 20 young girls *pericolate* and *ravvedute*, at the charitable house of the «Addolorata».

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<sup>9</sup> Sr. Serafina Rosa and Sr. Teresa Bosio to whom a novice was added, most probably they were accompanied by Prevost Bosio on 12 March 1842 - cf. L. I. MAZZA, *Vita della Ven. suor M. Vincenza Gerosa*, Modena, 1910, 188-189.

<sup>10</sup> Istituto Addolorata - Milan, letters of 11 February and 22 March 1842, Correspondence in AGSdC.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem, letter 7 April 1842; cf. L. I. MAZZA, *Vita della Gerosa*, 88, 192-193.

In the general archives of the Institute, documentation regarding this institution before the arrival of the sisters is scarce, and completely missing from 1842 to 1853 due to war fire, which in 1943 destroyed the whole building. The reference documents are: a Regulation of 1836<sup>12</sup> which remains the only legal document on record, revised in a few points, after the legacy of «Viani» in 1854<sup>13</sup>, and the concise notes in the history records of the Congregation<sup>14</sup>.

The Institution which already existed in 1815, in the district of the Contrada della Guastalla and depending upon the «Pia Unione» was run by the «Dame Canonichesse di Sant' Agostino of Châlons»<sup>15</sup>; in 1836 it was erected as an *Ente Morale* (Charitable Institution). Through the documents of foundation of the «Pia Unione» it is known that in Milan there were two Establishments for the «Ricovero di Figlie», one in the Contrada della Guastalla, 100, for the *pericolate ravvedute*, and another one in a house in Borgo della Fontana, 129, for the *pericolanti* (Foundation Castiglioni).

Written records also say that the «Ospizio delle pericolanti» run with the existing rules for the *pericolate*, was intended to be a single Establishment, under the name «Beata Vergine Addolorata» (we do not know exactly when the new name was taken) and here after: «That the disciplinary, administrative and economic management of the Institute, be entrusted to the Sisters of Charity in Milan» (No. 1) and «That the spiritual direction both for the *pericolate* as well as for the *pericolanti* is to be entrusted to the religious Congregation of the Barnabite Fathers in Milan subject to the parish rights of St Eustorgio» (No. 2). In 1849 the «Stabilimento delle pericolate ravvedute» is transferred to Porta Ticinese Borgo S. Croce, 5 (Fondazione Vimercati), while the primitive location passes to the «Ospedale Maggiore», due to the increasing number of the sick.

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<sup>12</sup> The Foundation Document of the «Pia unione di beneficenza», 3 May 1838, under the reign of Ferdinando I - A typed copy of the file sent to the Superior of the Institute by the Chairman, Earl Gian Paolo Melzi D'Eril, on 29 May 1955.

<sup>13</sup> Istrumento dello stabilimento di «Santa Croce», 27 March 1854.

<sup>14</sup> L. I. MAZZA, *Vita della Gerosa*, Modena, 1910, 188-189, 192-193; A. PREVEDELLO, *L'Istituto delle Suore di carità*, Venezia, 1933, I, 94-95; 1936, III, 70.

<sup>15</sup> Congregation founded in Lorena and approved by Pope Urbano VIII in 1628.

The *Regolamento organico* of 1836<sup>16</sup> determined the purpose of the Institution: «The aim of the Establishment is to accept and to lodge young girls who, although due to inexperience, need, or seduction have been drawn to evil, they have, however, kept the basics of good principles, and are available and keen to turn to the right path rather than just looking for support, shelter and assistance. Moreover, in a separate place another shelter for 36 poor *pericolanti* was opened; the same approved norms of the *pericolate* were applied, for their maintenance and instruction» (No. 9), and among the requirements for admission it was stated: «Normally, both *pericolate* and *pericolanti*, should not be less than 12 years old and not over 20» (No. 12); «They should be young girls, therefore not married nor widows; even if through unfortunate circumstances they have been drawn to evil, they should, however, have right principles of religion and honour, and they should be willing to turn back to Christian life and morals» (No. 13).

These rules and requirements are equal to all the other institutions which have the same purpose, while the indications given regarding the treatment of the inmates are surprisingly different; they are not inspired by a disciplinary rigour but rather by a pedagogical-formative concern, with all due respect and attention to the person so as to facilitate rehabilitation: in fact, among the other things it is said: «the inmates be decently dressed without the uniform, though without any kind of distinction that can stimulate jealous rivalry» (No. 43), and again: «...they cannot be subject to corporal punishment except by being deprived of certain kinds of food but not in the quantity of it and maybe some penalty in com-

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<sup>16</sup> The Foundation Document of the «Pia unione di beneficenza», pp. 102-130; cf. Istrumento dello «Stabilimento Santa Croce», pp. 30-40, slight modifications pp. 28-30; cf. Tipografia del Patronato, Milano, 1875, pp. 3-24.

petition with their companions. When they commit faults they should be corrected in a friendly manner by the teachers and, if they do not submit themselves to these admonitions, by the Directress» (No. 49). The main duty of the teachers is to propose to the young girls religious and moral principles, to teach them to read and write, to instruct them in the main elements of Arithmetic and Housecraft, «taking care concerning the latter, and training them thoroughly in skills which are more necessary and useful for their future as good mothers of a family according to their social condition and as qualified waitresses» (No. 48). In the article 55 there is an important statement which says that although the Institution has been erected by the «Pia Unione» and continues to be supervised by it, it absolutely has: «an existence of its own and it is independent».

Recorded information on the Institution is resumed with the letter, dated 20 September 1853, by the Director Vimercati to the Superior General which states clearly the development of the *Ricovero*; it shelters more than a hundred inmates and is capable of receiving also others if the number of the sisters could be increased; in her reply Mother Teresa Bosio affirms (26 September 1853) that at the moment it is not possible, but she has better hopes in the near future, considering the high importance of the Institution. In fact, through a chart which provides current data regarding the number of the *pericolanti* and *pericolate*, as well as the number of the sisters working from 1844 to 1855, we note that along the years the number of the inmates increased:

| Current years | Inmates | New admissions | Left | Remaining | Sisters |
|---------------|---------|----------------|------|-----------|---------|
| 1844-1848     | 25-27   |                |      |           | 2       |
| 1849          | 25      | 15             | 2    | 38        | 5       |
| 1850          | 38      | 34             | 17   | 55        | 6       |
| 1851          | 55      | 44             | 16   | 83        | 6       |
| 1852          | 83      | 44             | 27   | 97        | 8       |
| 1853          | 97      | 38             | 28   | 107       | 9       |
| 1854          | 107     | 33             | 23   | 117       | 10      |
| 1855          | 117     | 40             | 39   | 118       | 10      |

From another chart which is not dated nor signed, we learn that in 1911 the sisters of the «Istituto Addolorata» are 11, all craft teachers (*maestre di lavoro*) who are paid £ 200 per year; the girls are 160 and in 1912 they become 120. Through the Annual Statistics of the General Secretariat we know the names of the superiors who took over the management of the House: Sr. Cristina Nicolodi for 35 years, Sr. Carolina D'Anna for 17 years, Sr. Teresa Soster from 1912 to 1939, particularly difficult years; Sr. Giuditta De Capitani succeeds her until 1953.

The correspondence between the President and the Superior General, survived in the archives, concerns the request of sisters, postulants and *mandatarie* for the general services and to facilitate an unbroken surveillance. Worth mentioning is what the President, A. Degli Occhi, writes to Mother Ghezzi (8 June 1913), thanking her for sending two sisters: «My request was justified by the huge amount of work to which the good and clever sisters have to attend at the «Istituto Addolorata»; moreover, the hard work is rendered more bitter by a spirit of independence that become increasingly noticeable as a result of the rebellion spirit they absorb from their families. It is evident that my instance was not determined by a sense of mistrust towards those who already dedicate themselves in the education of the inmates: it was rather to acknowledge the weight of their sacrifice, I am aware that it is not fair to ask from them more work than they are already doing with so much self-denial». This is one of the few testimonies by a lay person regarding the good work done by the sisters with total dedication, love and spirit of sacrifice. In a diary-report of the community we also read: «Taking into consideration the period after first World War until the present day, the 'Istituto Addolorata' from 1932 to 1939 reached its maximum efficiency under the wise and enlightened governance of the unforgettable superior Sr. Teresa Soster, incomparable educator whose motto was: 'To love and to let oneself be loved so as to lead all to Christ' ...Besides the superior, the sisters in charge of the management of the 'Opera Pia' were 19: 15 sisters and 4 *mandatarie*. In dealing with the lay persons, the kitchen work, the large hen house and in the vegetable garden the sisters were helped by 6 ex-pupils

who remained in the Institution for life, under the motherly care of the superior. The pupils, divided into 4 groups, were about 120.

Everything was simple, everything was informal in the Institute, and the young girls who tirelessly did needle-work, knitting and attended classes enjoyed, as far as possible, family life where a loving surveillance created an atmosphere of broad relief and where the heart of a mother suffered and rejoiced with them.

The many and the various works were done with the greatest ease and perfect accuracy. The excellent proof of this were the annual big needle-work exhibitions, the works of the inmates were highly appreciated and at the 8<sup>th</sup> Competition of the «Triennial of Milan» they deserved the golden medal diploma. From this environment full of understanding and charity, among the strong young girls who were also perfect workers, a few have entered into religious life».

From 1936 the Institute made use of «Villa Cornelia» at Az-zate (Varese), gift of a benefactress; during the summer holidays it was used by the girls as a holiday house. From 1942 to **1954** it was used as a lodging house for the war refugees. When they returned to Milan, in the new house still in construction in via Calatafimi, 10, the social and environmental needs change and impose important changes in the management of the «Istituto Addolorata»: the Institution founded exclusively with purposes of rehabilitation and training for life, gradually assumes a new cultural profile and becomes an educational Institute until 1991, in order to meet the needs of the city and its outskirts in dynamic fidelity to the charism of foundation.

### **«PIO ISTITUTO DELLE PENITENTI», IN VENICE**

On **11 September 1847**, after a broad correspondence between Card. Patriarch Jacopo Monico and don A. Bosio, and the latter with the Diocese of Brescia<sup>17</sup>, twelve sisters arrived at «San Giobbe», in the Sestiere of Cannaregio, 893 in Venice. It provided lodging for about 90 young girls, recommended by a priest ‘investigator’,

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<sup>17</sup> Letters from 15 April to 12 August 1847, in AGSdC, 239/G.

normally for the period of 5 years or, if they did not get married, for a period according to the discernment of the Management.

The Institute's disciplinary, economical and educational management were, at the beginning, entrusted to the care of a Prioress, aided by teachers and lay assistants who, though well-intentioned and attentive, were not motivated by a spirit of charity and self-sacrifice. Before the end of the same year the Sisters of Charity were asked to run the management of the Institute and immediately the Cardinal writes to the Vicar Sr. Crocifissa Rivellini: «I consider the coming of the twelve Sisters of Charity among us as a clear manifestation of the divine Providence. They have already taken on the economic and disciplinary governance of this important Institution of the *penitenti* ... I feel in duty bound to thank, first of all, the Lord from whom every grace comes, and then to express my special gratitude to You, Reverend Mother Vicar, for sharing also here the benefits of your holy Institute»<sup>18</sup>.

The dreadful political events of 1848 forced the sisters to move to the Institute of the *Terese*, but the inmates complained because the house was too small. They spent a month and a half amongst the reverberations of the cannons; soon after, thanks to orders given by the Management, they moved to a larger, rented house. By this time Venice had been under siege for eleven months, and the population started feeling the pangs of famine. Furthermore, cholera broke out and several girls fell victim to it. After a month full of sacrifices and difficulties they managed to go back to «Istituto S. Giobbe»<sup>19</sup>. Again in the first World War the house was not spared:

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<sup>18</sup> Letter by the Card. Patriarch of Venice to the Vicar General of the Sisters of Charity of Lovere, Venice, 3 November 1847, Prot. No. 1316, *ibidem*.

<sup>19</sup> Outlines of the events happened in 1848 to the Sisters of Charity in Venice, residing at the «Istituto delle penitenti». The report is neither signed nor dated, in AGSdC, 239/L.

during an air raid in 1915 the cannon of a machine gun which was in front of the church of the Institute exploded causing the house to tremble, and a bomb fell in the garden; luckily the sisters and the girls came to no harm<sup>20</sup>.

The House of the *penitenti* depended directly on the Management of the Institutes of *Terese*, *Gesuati* and *Penitenti* of the Lombardo-Veneto Kingdom, Province of Venice. The aim of the Institute was: «to give shelter to the public prostitutes, or to women raped and stained with infamy, for the ill repute of their past deeds or for reasons of public scandal (among the inmates there were also women who had committed infanticide)<sup>21</sup>, who had declared that they wanted to retire from prostitution, into which, for lack of human support or means of livelihood could, even if against their will, fall back upon...»<sup>22</sup>; thus says the Regulation which defined the nature of the Institute, indicated the disciplinary rules, fixed the periods dedicated to prayer and to work as if it were a religious community: «The daughters of the House are divided into three wards or groups with separate dormitories, working laboratories, choir and refectory (No. 16). Strict silence is to be observed (27). It is absolutely forbidden to use pendants or any other female ornament (28). With the same severity they were forbidden to go out of the house, to look out of the windows, to receive or write letters – the Superior had the duty to read all the letters – they were not allowed to talk to each other in a low voice. They had to speak in a way that the Teachers could follow what they were saying (29). They were helped to settle down in marriage, or placed as maids in private houses, or to return home to their parents (33)».

Even the diet for the superior and the sisters was fixed. The diet of the inmates is equal; the only variation is the sum available to prepare supper: 14 cents in the fat days and 42 in lean days.

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<sup>20</sup> cf A. PREVEDELLO, *L'Istituto delle Suore di carità*, Venezia, 1936, III,140-141.

<sup>21</sup> cf Letter of the 'Governo provvisorio' of Venice of 8 November 1848, Prot. No. 67, in AGSdC, 239/G.

<sup>22</sup> Disciplinary and Economical Regulations for the «Pia casa penitenti» in Venice approved by the Government with the Decree of 9 February 1848 No. 50964 of 1847, in AGSdC, 239/K.

### DIET PLAN FOR THE SUPERIOR AND THE SISTERS

|   |             |     |
|---|-------------|-----|
| Bread   | Pound (Ibs) | 1.  |
| Rice  | Ounces      | 4.  |
| Wine  | 1/4         | 1/2 |
| Beef  | Ounces      | 6.  |
| Second side dish, fruit and supper on days with meat                      | Cents       | 70. |
| Soup dressing, supper, fruit on lean days and beside bread, rice and wine | Cents       | 86. |

Changes to the diet system were introduced in 1864, replacing the provision of foodstuff with an anticipated monthly allowance of 45 pence a day for the sisters and vouchers for the ‘figlie’ (inmates) released to the superior<sup>23</sup>. The annual salary for the inmates that help with the housework is £ 300, that of the sisters is £ 100 each. The file included also the «daily regulations for the secluded», a «timetable of weekdays and holidays» and other documents which have no date nor signature.

Education was imparted in the three separate groups of Grammar and Moral lessons, and optional female works: needle-work, mending, tailoring and embroidery for the needs of the Institute and for commission agents. The orders were to be registered, and it was the superior’s duty to distribute the work among the inmates.

On 27 August 1850, Prot. No. 1455, the Chairman Pietro Memo writes to the Superior of the «Pia casa penitenti»: «I am directed by the Imperial Regio Provincial Delegation (*Ordinanza 22 corrente n. 15732=1652*) to express to you, respected Superior, on behalf also of the whole Inspecting Committee, the feelings of satisfaction for the excellent way the Institution of the *penitenti* is kept ...I don’t want to delay in letting you know the contentment of the Man-

<sup>23</sup> Letter by the Chairman Venier to the superior dated 29 February 1864, Prot. No. 1491, in AGSdC, 239/I.

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem - N.B. It is interesting to read entirely the text and the manuscript.

agers and the total conviction that the ‘Pia Casa’ is kept in perfect order». A similar satisfaction is expressed by the Superior General Sr. Teresa Bosio, who had been there personally when she accompanied two sisters for the service of the «Pia Casa»; «she was satisfied with the good and regular proceedings; therefore, she did not hesitate to appoint and to nominate formally as Superior of the ‘Pia Casa’, Sr. Caterina Santinelli who for eight months had carried out the functions and the praiseworthy results mentioned above»<sup>25</sup>.

The Superior General had to inform both the local Bishop and the Management of the Institution about the change of superior and have their approval; it was the Superior’s duty to make a monthly ‘report’ regarding the ‘*Corrigende*’ (inmates under correction) and in certain disciplinary cases she had to inform the Management, so as to provide appropriate measures through the «Police Head Office of His Royal Majesty».

With the letter of 28 February 1852, Prot. No. 258, the Public Ministry Chairman informed the superior of a possible visit of His Royal Majesty, the Emperor, to the Institution. The inspection of the House was severe and done by various State Bodies. However on 17 March 1857 the Emperor, Francesco Giuseppe I awarded the golden cross for the merit to the Superior Sr. Caterina Santinelli.

We are in possession of a large exchange of correspondence with the Administration regarding the accepting and the leave-taking of the *penitenti*, some of whom came from the Women’s Prison, the budgets of extraordinary expenses, the updated daily allowance of the sisters and the prohibition to send food leftovers outside the House...<sup>26</sup>.

On 12 September 1894 the Management of the «Pia Casa» was transferred to the Congregation of Charity in Venice - «Pia Opera». The relationships with our Institute continued under the same con-

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<sup>25</sup> Letter by the Superior Sr. Teresa Bosio to the Head Officer of the «Pia casa delle penitenti» in Venice, Milan, 29 October 1851, in AGSdC, 239/H.

<sup>26</sup> Letter by the Chairman to the Superior General, Venice, 17 February 1857, Prot. No. 15 p.v. and by the Superior General, Milan, 20 February 1857, Prot. No. 125/b, in AGSdC, 239/H; cf. 239/I; 239/J.

ditions: the sisters were responsible for the management of the House and for the education of the young girls and of the women.

In 1951 the president of the Head Administration of the Decentralized Institutions of E.C.A. (Assisting Communal Organization), in Venice, wrote to the Superior Sr. Carmelita Crotti: «I would like to thank you for your clear and consoling report about the running of the Institute which you direct and I beg you to accept my sincere expressions of contentment for the excellent results obtained... The self-denial and the self-sacrifice of the good sisters, worthy followers in the footsteps traced out by Saints B. Capitanio and V. Gerosa, who in humility fulfil in the Institute their daily work animated by a noble ideal of Christian virtues, will surely receive a worthy reward from Heaven»<sup>27</sup>.

In 1954, due to the critical financial situation of the «Istituto San Giobbe», the Administration had to adopt a series of measures to increase the income and reduce expenditure; among these measures was the discontinuance of the service of two sisters. On **31 December 1956**, it was difficult to ensure a continued presence in sending new sisters. With previous authorization of the Patriarch of Venice, Angelo Giuseppe Card. Roncalli, after a regular consignment and in good accord with the administration of E.C.A.<sup>28</sup>, the Congregation withdrew the sisters from the Institution. The letters sent by the guests to the President of E.C.A., to the provincial superior of Venice, and to His Em. the Patriarch, and to the Assistant, Sr. Z. Bertulesi, in Milano have never received an answer. In these letters they beseeched: «that our Sisters who for several years have assisted us with goodness and attention, may remain among us»<sup>29</sup>. The superior at the time was Sr. Teresita Quartiero.

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<sup>27</sup> Letter of 25 January 1951, Prot. No. 4/PP-51, in AGSdC, 239/J.

<sup>28</sup> Letter of 12 November 1956, *ibidem*.

<sup>29</sup> Letter of 14 November 1956, *ibidem*.