

Doc. IX (from *Positio*)  
FOUNDATION OF THE CONGREGATION  
OF THE SCHOOLS OF CHARITY  
(1812-1820)

Introduction.

In this document we aim to study the genesis in the mind of the Cavanis brothers of the new religious congregation, and the events of its historical realization. In conjunction, we will also need to talk about the similar project of a female congregation. As for consolidation and canonical approval, we will make a topic of study in the next Docc. XI and XIII. To better highlight the courage and perseverance with which the Servants of God pursued the implementation of their project, until to see it translated into reality, we will accompany our study with some hints to the circumstances of the times.

1. FIRST IDEAS (1812).

When the two Cavanis began their apostolate in the among of youth, they were far from thinking that the Lord would devote them to being founders of a new congregation. But when they saw the pious institution develop beyond their expectations, they began to think of how “to ensure their livelihood; there was not a better means except to establish a special ecclesiastical congregation, where the perennial succession of zealous priests could be introduced, as vocation to the charitable ministry to exercise the lovely office of fathers, without any public or private remuneration, towards the youth in need of education. There is no doubt that the project of such a congregation has matured in their minds after long and repeated reflections. But when they could be sure of God’s will in this regard, they had no hesitation, even though they were aware that their project would expose them, as they wrote, “to new thoughts and cares. to lead it to effect.” We believe that the first ideas surfaced in the soul of the Servants of God after about ten years of experience among young people, perhaps during 1811, or in the first half of 1812. Now, bearing in mind that in May 1810 Napoleon had ordered the general suppression of all religious societies, the closure of convents, the dispersal of male and female religious and , and the confiscation of their possessions, one realizes that, realistically - although religious ferments, and some organizations were in place - a new religious congregation was not even conceivable.

Nor does it seem that by then the Cavanis thought about it: it was already very much if they could gather around the young people and keep open the oratory for the festive Mass. However, it was also necessary to look at the future of the work “to ensure its stable subsistence in the best way”. Note the cautious historical realism of these words. And the best way, at that time possible, was to have at least some of those young people, who under their care were maturing their vocation in the institution of schools of charity But here another obstacle, seemingly insurmountable, seemed to take away all hope of achieving the intent: the law on military conscription, which exonerated only clerics who lived in seminary. In such a situation in fact the Cavanis did not lose courage and convinced of the urgency and duty that loomed over them, they attempted the first step.

On 2 June, the Bishop of Faenza, Stefano Bonsignori, the capitular administrator of Venice, visited the institute. He had been invited by the Cavanis, who hoped to have the support for the problem of functions in the oratory of the schools, which the police had banned. “He visited the oratory, the garden, the schools, the work house; he showed full satisfaction with everything. In order to give a more precise idea of the charitable institution, and to preserve the memory of our cares, ‘he was given a detailed information of the whole plan of the work, which he read and welcomed. It was a first contact, with which they hoped that the prelate would realize their concerns about the future of the institution. On 13 June, trusting in the good impression he had, they presented an appeal, in which they asked him to have at their disposal two clerics exempt from military conscription by registering among the pupils of the seminary, and exempted from the obligations of the parish service. Under the circumstances, the route was daring, and they understood it (ibid.); but it was their habit now not to get lost in the face of any difficulties.

Bonsignori took time to think about it, not least because he didn’t want to compromise with the government, of which he was unfortunately a docile instrument. “After unravelling some difficulties ... he fully understood the convenience of that question and promised to give thought when he would have come to Milan, some days later”. So, Fr. Marco. However, more than a month passed without receiving any response from the bishop. Fr. Marco then wrote to Countess Carolina Durini, explaining everything to her and begging her to mediate with him. The lady was urged to carry out the commission by means of a ‘very effective person’; but the answer was still timed. Finally he returned to Venice, and on November 20 the two brothers visited him. He “introduced the discourse on the instance produced [...], he declared himself persuaded to allow a young dress up the clerical dress, and remaining out of the seminary to be ascribed to the service of the oratory, where under the supervision of the directors he devoted

himself to the assistance of the youth. This singular privilege was welcome and unexpected, and it is still to be remarked, in the calamity of present times, the existence of some few oratories, and also the difficulty manifested by the prelate himself to allow that a cleric could be exempted from the seminary.

After these expressions of satisfaction, we find in the subject the most absolute silence: they no longer speak of clerics in the service of the oratory of schools, nor of dressings. In this behavior, so strange in appearance, we believe that we see some rethinking on the part of the Servants of God. It is likely that someone enlightened them about the illegal position of Bonsignori in the diocese of Venice. He had been appointed patriarch by Napoleon, but his appointment had not been ratified by the Holy See, as had been the case with his predecessor Nicola Gamboni. However, he had been invested in the authority of administrator of the diocese by the metropolitan chapter, though under the pressure of political power, and this could be interpreted as a legally valid title. In fact, his position was canonically illegal, because as a bishop he could not accept *the intrusion into a place proposed* by the secular authority, nor could the chapter vicar be able to give him the ordinary jurisdiction deposited in his person. This may explain how the Cavanis, who became aware of the state of affairs, preferred to renounce the privilege obtained, rather than to be stained even by the shadow of little fidelity to the supreme authority of the pope, whose sufferings could hardly be ignored. This hypothesis seems to us to be validated by The Judgment expressed by Fr. Mark on this period defined as 'time of confusion and disturbance'. Even for the Cavanis there would have been a moment of real confusion, to which they made up as soon as they were enlightened. In the expression then of this judgment on the whirling historical period, we find another witness to the common habit of the two brothers to veil with silence the weaknesses and defects of others.

Commento [R1]:

## 2. THE FIRST PROJECT OF THE CONGREGATION PRESENTED TO PIO VII.

After what was reported, the Cavanis had to remain silent and still ponder on the most effective way of providing for the future of the work, while with ever-increasing passion they dealt with the development of schools. Thus passed 1813, while the primitive idea evolved in their minds to the point of proposing a new congregation.

In this meantime, events precipitated: the Veneto was gradually occupied by advancing Austrian troops, and in vain Viceroy Eugenio excited the people to resist. On 3 October 1813 Venice was declared undersiege. Napoleon was finally beaten in Leipzig on the 20th of the same month. For its part, the People of Venice, despite the fact that the hospitals were filling up with wounded, was indifferent and in cheerful mood. "People joined the "tridui" in S. Mark; spent more, but wanted to eat as usual for Christmas Eve; they paid 84 venetian lires for the stages at the theater in S. Beneto to hear the Prometeo of Troilo Malipiero, which was repeated for fifteen days, with great participation of the people. They attended the theater S. Moisé; people danced at the "ridotto" and in the halls of the theater La Fenice". On April 16<sup>th</sup> 1814, Viceroy Eugenio was forced to sign the armistice and to cede Venice and Veneto to Austria. On the 20th day the Austrian troops occupied the square militarily, and on the 25th, the feast of St. Mark, the official news was published. General Seras left Venice accompanied by popular boeing. Finally, on 9 May, Bonsignori also left to ask forgiveness to the Pope for his past and return to the headquarters of Faenza. Meanwhile, the government of the diocese was taken by the Archdeacon mons. Luciano Luciani, elected vicar of the Chapter. Even Pius VII with a triumphant voyage returned to his Rome.

The return of Austria to Venice and of the pope to Rome gave rise to the Cavanis the desire to submit to the supreme authority of the church the projects matured in previous years for the future of their work, and to ask for its approval. They prepared the document with all care, and on May 28th, 1814, they sent it to their friend and benefactor the abbot Carlo Zen, then titular archbishop of Calcedonia, to submit it to the pope.

## 3. FEATURES OF THE 1814 PLAN IN ITS ESSENTIAL LINES.

As this is an important text, which we publish, we aim to propose its essential features; which will serve us for an appropriate comparison with the following plans of 1816 and 1818. After a brief analysis of the evils of the era, whose "murky flood [...] " affects and invests the tender youth ", the authors point out how this, either because of ignorance, or because of the practical impossibility, or because of the neglect of many parents, poor above all, growing up without a restraint of discipline and left to itself. It is therefore needed, they say, to make up for such deficiencies by parents, through 'workers well trained in the difficult ministry, and still free to devote themselves fully to them'. Now, as Venice lacks a religious institution dealing to this office, they propose a congregation of secular priests, who devote themselves with zeal and charity, and provide for the spread of free lower schools, and therefore accessible to all, in the various districts of the city, according to the needs of the parishes. It is easy to understand that the plan is motivated precisely on this prospect of spreading charity schools to the whole city, for a complete remediation of the Venetian youth in need of education. To this end, the Cavanis exclude the school as an educational medium in its own and consider it in a unitary pedagogical vision together with the recreation (the

garden) and the environment for worship (the oratory). As we have seen, this program clashed with the government and was overwhelmed.

There is no doubt that the new religious society, as it is proposed by the plan, takes inspiration from the congregation of the secular priests of the holy education and the “scuole pie”, also called St. Joseph Calasanzio, in Chioggia. See what it will be said about this in the Doc. XII (intr.). There is also a certain influence of the “Filipini” organization, which the Cavanis had long known at Fava. That said, let’s see in a nutshell the characteristics of the proposed congregation.

- a) It should be a branch of the order of the poor regular clerics of the Mother of God, founded by St. Joseph Calasanzio; should therefore bear the title of congregation of the secular priests of the Mother of God.
  - b) Purpose: to offer to secular priests “a new means to adequately attend to their sanctification”, engaging them to “just seek the free assistance of youth”.
  - c) Fundamental means of this apostolate is, as has already been said, the free school integrated by the oratory and the garden or recreation.
  - d) No votes are made in the congregation, and members are united with only the bond of “charity and peace”, like the Filippini.
  - (c) Everyone must share the fruit of the ecclesiastical estate, the alms of masses and any other emolument perceived outside the school.
  - f) Each one will be free to leave the congregation, “when he judges it to be convenient.”
  - g) The congregation will also be free to dismiss ‘those who could be considered deserving of expulsion’.
  - h) Everyone must obey a superior, who will have the title of director, and will be assisted by two consultors elected by a majority of members.
  - (i) The rules ‘will require what is necessary for a regulated discipline’.
  - l) The tenor of life should not be austere, “having to endure a very laborious labour”.
  - m) The dress will be that of secular priests, with the addition of some distinctive sign.
  - n) The founders find it incompatible for a member to be ascribed to the service of a parish, because he is called to “a job that demands the occupation of the whole man. For their training the clerics must be exempt from the seminary and therefore entrusted to the care of the congregation.
  - o) The congregation will be at the dependence of the ordinary bishop, but excludes any interference of the parish priests.
  - p) The livelihoods are based on the community of goods, as mentioned in paragraph e), and on the aims of the faithful’. There is therefore always room for practising exercise of confidence in divine Providence.
- In conclusion, it is important to note that there is no mention of the work house and typography as educational means of the institution.

#### 4. HOW THE CAVANIS PROJECT WAS WELCOMED IN ROME.

On 19<sup>th</sup> of January 1815 the ab. Carlo Zen wrote to them: “The plan was very much liked, except for the name of the institute, which equals that of the pious schools, and I think it would be easily approved with a few modifications, provided that the ordinary bishop or the Sovereign would not obstruct”. He was making it clear to the Cavanis from which directions the most serious difficulties could come: the diocesan ecclesiastical authority of Venice and the Austrian government, which settled in Veneto, whose markedly jurisdictional tendencies were known. It would soon begin to set up a programme of ecclesiastical restoration policy, whose reflections would also directly affect the project in question, as we shall see. This set of religious impressions and political contingencies was echoed by the response that the secretary of the Holy Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, Mons. Giuseppe Morozzo, wrote to those concerned on November 24<sup>th</sup> 1814. The conclusion was that the approval of the plan was postponed to better times, and that the Cavanis had to exercise patience and perseverance for a long time. Nevertheless, they were very comforted, due to the holy Father’s feelings toward them, and for the blessing. On 14<sup>th</sup> December, then, they sent Morozzo their thanks, begging him to be an interpreter with the pope, and also to warn them when he believed the favorable time had come to resubmit their demands. And they added: “We will not have adventure to lack in what is the responsibility of our part, and to give reason to a delay that could be too harmful.”

They manifested, unwillingly, the motives behind their tenacious insistence on achieving their intentions, whether with the plan of the congregation, or the freedom of their schools: if God had called them to found a congregation,

they they had a duty and a responsibility to respond faithfully to the vocation, and they feared only to fail by their own fault.

However, since they didn't want to miss the opportunity to obtain for the institute one of the convents remained empty after the Napoleonic suppression, and the affair seemed to them urgent, on May 20th 1815 they addressed to the Pope a plea asking that he would at least authorize the ordinary to reserve for that future congregation one of the near convents, indicating as more suitable the one of the "Salute" which had belonged to the "Somaschi". For the same purpose, on August 19<sup>th</sup> they contacted card. Consalvi. Certainly, they could not be aware that other much more serious problems were on the table of diplomacy, including the relations of the "S. Sede" with the Austrian government and the issues of the elections of seven bishops in Veneto, including the Patriarch of Venice. The two pleas were therefore senza feedback. Thus "everything still remained in darkness and silence", commented Fr. Marco -, and nevertheless approached conceitedly to a very happy term".

#### 5. THE EMPEROR'S FIRST VISIT TO THE CAVANIS INSTITUTES:

December 12th 1815.

Divine Providence moved the religious spirit of Emperor Francis I to honor the Institute on the current day with his visit. In the Memoirs of the Institute, then, on the same 12<sup>th</sup> day, Fr. Marco recorded details of that "memoranda" visit. We only report the introduction: "This morning, in which the office of the B.V. of Loreto falls, at about 11 o'clock the schools of charity were honored by a visit of his majesty the Emperor Francis I. At the previous feast of the Conception of the B.V. had come the notice of this visit, which had to be made the next day; but it remained suspended and was deferred until the present Tuesday, in which fell another solemnity of Mary." The occasion was excellent not only to solicit the generosity of the sovereign, but also, and above all, to provide for the future of the work. The particular satisfaction he showed "inspired great confidence in the brothers to obtain on such a good occasion his sincere consent to found the new congregation". For the purpose they had already prepared a plea and handed it to him. The emperor welcomed it with benevolence and inserted it in the usual information.

On February 10<sup>th</sup> 1816, "seeing no evidence of the memorial presented in the hands of H.M., about the project of the ecclesiastical congregation", they presented a new application to the governor Earl of Goess, who had repeatedly shown support for them, as is inferred from the memories of the Institute. His speech had to be effective if on March 1st, the provincial delegation asked the plan of the new congregation. On March 7<sup>th</sup> the Cavanis presented the document, which in its essence does not differ from the one presented to the Pope. There is, however, no mention of the plan to spread the number of lower schools in the various city districts, perhaps because of a prudent waiting criterion, since some rumours had to circulate about the government's intentions on the subject, and not to hinder the practice so unnecessarily. Following the bureaucratic process of the same, they learned that the government council was about to give its opinion; then on May 15th they took care to present to some councillors a memo, in which they explained the social and pedagogical reasons for their project. However, while they were waiting for this to be forwarded to the imperial court, in the sitting of May 18th the council decided to keep everything suspended, until 'the sovereign resolutions on the instruction of the people arise'. The bitterness of the unexpected resolution was tempered by a document of praise and encouragement for their zeal, which we publish.

#### 6. PATRIARCH FRANCESCO MARIA MILESI AND THE CAVANIS.

1 On November 17th 1816, the new Patriarch Francesco M. Milesi arrived in Venice, in a strictly private form. On December 3th, both brothers were to pay him treat and to present him with a plea, "in which, realizing the plan they designet of an ecclesiastical congregation to provide for the education of the poor, and the difficulties that arose to effect it, they pleaded for some measure for the subsistence of the institute". The Milesi answered orally, "showing his good desire to benefit the work, but at the same time making known how the circumstances of the times formed a strong obstacle. We had to be patient again. And they were patient for another six months, until they decided to prepare two friendly priests, the Filipino Roberto Balbi and the ab. Giuseppe Molinari, confessor of the young people of the schools, to speak to the patriarch in order to obtain six clerics exempt from the parish service, who could be educated under their direction. The outcome of the mission was positive, and on April 18th, 1817 Milesi confirmed to the two brothers what he had said, and he was really thoughtful of the thing, advising them to present directly to him the cards of the aspirants, to avoid any confusion. Thus on 14 May 1817, on the eve of the Ascension, three young people could gather in the house of the garden under the guidance of the priest and teacher of the schools Pietro Loria: Domenico Todesco, Pietro Spernich; Giovanni Greco. The following day they began a course of spiritual exercises, and on the day of Pentecost the Spernich wore the clerical dress and

with Todesco received the “cotta” from the hands of Fr. Antonio, in the presence of the oldest students of the schools.

#### 7. GOVERNMENT AND PATRIARCHAL APPROVAL OF THE CAVANIS PLAN.

Before dealing with how the practices for the approval of the plans of the Servants of God by the civil authority, and therefore of the religious diocesan authority, it is necessary to anticipate an historical information.

The Spalato's decree. - The re-establishment of the religious guilds suppressed under the Napoleonic regime was part of the Austrian restoration programme in the Lombardo-Veneto territory. To regulate with criteria of practical usefulness for religion and the state, such restoration, on May 17th 1818 Francis I issued a decree, from Spalato, which in part certainly favored the intent of the Cavanis. On the 24th, Deputy Governor Porcia notified the patriarch of Venice the rules of implementation. Among other things, it read: “S.m.i.r.a.<sup>1</sup> has deigned to declare that, in relation to the restoration of the ecclesiastical and regular guilds, it is his will that in the Kingdom of Lombardo-Veneto those communities which by the Church and the State are called to the education of youth are re-established; then those who attend to the recollection and care of poor orphans, derelicts and infirm; those who gave assistance in the care of souls and in the confessional, to which last purpose they can properly serve the beggars’. It is clear the priority that the implementation of the decree gave to the reconstitution of those guilds that devoted themselves to the teaching and education of youth. Of course, to do this, the government urged clear guidance from diocesan bishops. With regard to women's institutions and the field of their educational activity, the government gave the following directives: “It is recommended that ordinary bishops should propose those women's guilds that, in addition to the education of noble and well-off daughters [...], can devote to the education of the daughters of the middle and popular class, to whom public schools can be opened at the respective convent, monastery, or conservatory, however you want to name it.” There was no mention of new institutions, but it was obvious that the government would consider them, especially if they belonged to the category dedicated to the education of young people, especially if poor.

b) Patriarch Milesi presents the Cavanis plan to the government. The Milesi therefore fulfilled his task on time and in July 1818 he called the Cavanis and ordered them to present the plan of the institute “with hope for success”. Let us now see in summary the succession of facts.

1818, July 27th: - The Cavanis present to the Patriarch the plan of the male and female congregations. He examines and suggest a different setting.

14 September: - The Patriarch forwards the document to the government with favorable accompaniment.

26 September: - The governor, Earl of Goess, responds to the patriarch that there is no difficulty on the part of the government for the Cavanis to associate other priests with livelihoods. For the women institutions, on the other hand, he mainly objects to the lack of livelihoods.

12 October: - The patriarch sends the text of the government's response to the Cavanis. Full of joy, they communicate the news to their pupils, and in thanks to the Lord solemnly display the SS.mo throughout the day, and display a wreath in honor of Our Lady.

14 October: - The Cavanis make the changes desired by the government to the plan for the female institution, and by presenting them to the patriarch still ask for sovereign approval for the male institution.

October 24: - The patriarch forwards the project to the government with the changes required.

1819, 27th January: - The Cavanis, through Archbishop Charles Zen, ask the Pope for some faculties for the purchase, possession and use of buildings of ecclesiastical origin in favor of their own institutions. They also add an excerpt of the plan of the two institutions. The faculties were obtained on August 7<sup>th</sup>; but the question of the plan, which in the intentions of the Cavanis, oblivious to the practices of the Roman curia, should have ended in the meeting of Zen with the pope, went instead the other way.

February 23th: - The Emperor's second visit to the institute. He expresses the desire for the congregation to be erected and extended elsewhere.

February 25th: - Cavanis Thanksgiving visit to the Emperor, who assures them of his personal commitment to speed up the approval practice.

March 16th: - On the occasion of the visit to Rome of Emperor Francis I, by means of Mons. Zen humiliate the pope a plea by pleading that he take advantage of the circumstance “to combine in concert the long-sought erection of the

proposal and ecclesiastic congregation". But the document is passed to S. Congr. bishops and regulars for ordinary information.

June 19: -The Emperor signs the Cavanis plan for approval in Perugia.

July 24: - Fr. Marco visits the Emperor, located in Strà, near Padua. He announces that he has signed the plan, repeating several times: "Oh with how much pleasure signed it! ».

21 August: - The royal delegation announces the supreme approval.

25 August: - Pleads of the Cavanis to Patriarch Milesi, to have from him the decree that "authorizes them to erect the two approved congregations".

August: - Meanwhile, the Holy Congregation of Bishops and regulars, to whom the excerpt of the plan of 27 January and the supplication of 16 March were passed, asks the Patriarch about the proposed new congregation. The patriarch remains distressed by the embarrassment in which he finds himself, "or to leave the H. Congregation unanswered, or to expose himself and also the new institution to the government, entering into relationship with Rome without prior license of the government itself": which was strictly demanded. Even the Cavanis remain distressed, because they cannot explain themselves with the bishop who is seriously ill, and because they fear that he will die before ordering the decree required. The mediation of Mr. Giuseppe Alessandri somewhat smooths out the difficulties of the misunderstanding.

14 September: - Milesi, of his own initiative, finally orders to write and send the desired decree. Fr. Marco comments: "A complex of remarkable circumstances happened to demonstrate in a special way how for our part we must humiliate ourselves and confess unworthy of so much grace, and on the other hand we have to trust strongly in divine goodness, resulting in very prosperous things despite any obstacle that stands in the way."

September 18th: - The Cavanis receive the decree. On the same morning patriarch Milesi died.

1820, 21st January: -Through Zen Archbishop, who became secretary of the H. Congr. of bishops and regulars, "in full tranquility of his own conscience. and to the great benefit and comfort of the nascent institution" they implore from the pope:

- 1) not a "breve", but only a "private assurance" of his "beneplacito" about the foundation of the two congregations;
  - 2) the power to establish houses outside the diocese;
  - 3) the right to wear a badge in the dress of the congregates;
  - 4) the faculty to apply for the institute the former convent of the Dominicans of the "Zattere". Special care they put to escape in this step to the control of the police, being, as they say, 'something of conscience'.
- c) Some relief. - Comparing three projects: 1814, 1816, 1818, the lowest of data is that of 1816. However, if one considers that the Servants of God filled it out solely for civil authority, one realizes how they felt it appropriate to submit a minimum of essential information to it, so as not to recklessly tie their hands. Their silence on certain issues therefore does not mean a regress from the 1814 plan, but rather wise caution. The plan of 1818 differs from the other two, both because it also takes into account the female institution, and because it is more synthetic and at the same time more analytical than that of 1814: it is evident the influence of the corrections suggested by the Patriarch. It is therefore clear why it is overflying on some points, and better precises others, which had to be more closely affected by the government. In addition, it no longer motivates on schools for the city's "sestieri", but aims at wider spread, beyond the city limits and diocese of Venice. It is easy to see, however, that the fundamental physiomic lines of the congregation remain unchanged: spirit, purpose, free school, no grades, freedom to leave the congregation and freedom to resign in certain cases, means of subsistence. The most significant differences, that is, those that indicate maturative progress, are as follows:
- 1) the congregation is no longer presented as a branch of the "Scolopi" order; and therefore, the denomination is also changed;
  - 2) introduces the theme, dear to the Cavanis, of spiritual exercises, for which the houses of the congregation will be made available at certain times between the year;
  - 3) it is stated that "the inner spirit of the work is [...] aimed at perfecting the "exercise of charity towards God and others", and for the first time we speak of a "perfect community";
  - 4) it is still stated that in every house the internal discipline and administration depend on the director; it is added that the various houses will be independent of each other, and therefore "they will be considered [...] as sisters"; and they will finally be subject to their Ordinary diocesans;
  - 5) Lastly, the request made for the congregation of the nearby church of St. Agnes does not seem negligible.

#### 8. FR. ANTONIO LEAVES HIS HOME TO START THE NEW CONGREGATION.

Having obtained the decrees, remembered above, The Servants of God started to prepare the seat of the congregation. It was August 27th, 1820. By this date the Servants of God had decided to begin the life of the new

congregation. This is how Fr. Marco talks about it in the Memoirs of the Institute: “August 27th, 1820. - On this day, the feast of our principal protector, St. Joseph Calasanzio, we began to inhabit the house that was prepared for the new congregation. The oldest of the directors entered it, having the other to take care of the octogenarian mother, and was joined by the cleric Pietro Spernich, Matteo Voltolini and Angelo Cerchieri, and as janitor the young Pietro Zalivani, all with a spirit of belonging to the new institute. The new house was first blessed by our parish priest; and may God Lord make her always flourish with his holy blessing.” This “new house” had been made from a series of small, old buildings corroded by salt, bought at the estate together with the garden. Despite adaptation work, it always maintained the appearance of the most austere poverty, and with complacency the Servants of God called it “la casetta” the cottage, and so it continued to be called in the congregation. Fr. Zanon comments on this: “At this damp and unhealthy house sighed the Cavanis brothers, who for it left their noble home, healthy, sunny and airy, located in one of the most beautiful points of Venice. They were led by the spirit of the Lord, to complete the correspondence with the divine vocation ... in the spirit and truth of evangelical poverty.” Speaking of this actual poverty, which Fr. Antonio intended to embrace, The Salsi testifies that two days before detaching from his home, the Servant of God took off his shoes the silver buckles and gave them to him, “ne quid aliud profani ornamenti sibimet superasset”. He was then forty-eight years and seven months old.

#### 9. THE PLAN FOR THE FEMALE CONGREGATION.

To complete what has been said above, let us also add a few mentions to the plan for the congregation of the female teachers of the schools of charity. The animating spirit does not differ, of course, from that of the male institution; the Cavanis, however, expressly also refer to the Canossa, who had marked of their spirit the first female teachers. If you compare the Cavanis plan and the plan presented by Canossa to the ecclesiastical and civil authority, it is easy to detect not only analogy, but in several places also true identity. Certainly, the government had the impression that the Cavanis document depended closely on the Canossa and clearly expressed it to the patriarch: “If the guild proposed had, beyond most of the rules taken by the ‘institute founded by the noble dame Canossa [...]’”. If, however, as has been observed, there is no denying a real “Canossiana” influence in the work of the Cavanis, we believe that more than transfusion of ideas in their field, we should talk about mutual influence and coincidence of thought. Otherwise we cannot explain the tenacity with which ours defended their institution, despite the economic disadvantages it suffered compared to the Canossian one. If they had not been sincerely convinced of their originality, it seems inexplicable to us that they had not thought or accepted the advice to melt their work with the canossian one. However, the only objection the government raised against the Cavanis plan was not to find the economic subsistence of the institution sufficiently assured, as it was configured by them; and therefore invited them to imitate the Canossa, which to the daughters of charity had imposed a personal dowry as a condition for entering the congregation. He then added a wish: that Cavanis agree with the Canossa, so that the teachers of the schools of charity “should also bear the burden of the care of the hospitals”, thus becoming sisters of charity, and thus “extending the beneficial Canossa Institute”. It is clear what the government was aiming for with such a proposal. The Cavanis agreed to impose the obligation of dowry on postulants; they also declared themselves willing to accept care in hospitals, in order not to contradict the government, and obtain and the desired approval. On the other hand, it did not urgently need to implement it, for which it was expected to take years. Fortunately, the Emperor did not appreciate the novelty, stating that the teachers “would thus be distracted by the purpose of the institution”; and the plan was approved keeping intact the spirit of the founders.

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<sup>1</sup>S.m.i.r.a.: means His Majesty Imperial Royal *Apostolic* (Title of the Emperor of Austria)

*(traduzione dall'Originale italiano, a cura di P. Remo Morosin - ROMA)*