

# RELIGIOUS CONGREGATIONS, EDUCATION AND SCHOOL IN ITALY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

*Congregaciones religiosas, educación y escuela  
en Italia en el siglo XIX*

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**Abstract:** The article traces the origins and development of about 140 new religious male and female congregations, established in Italy during the Nineteenth century. Starting from the Restoration period, the article frames the actions and choices of the new religious congregations with reference to the new scenarios produced by the revolutionary experience and by the changes introduced in ecclesiastical legislation and in the relations between State and Church during the Napoleonic era. At the same time, it deals with the unusual challenges the Church had to face due to both the secularization of mentality and customs and the increased educational needs and welfare of the post-revolutionary period. The author analyses some characteristics of these new religious institutions, most of which chose as privileged—and sometimes exclusive— activity of their apostolate the assistance (of poor and sick people, and of abandoned children and youth), the catechesis and animation of religious life in the parishes and, above all, the education of youth of both sexes and of different social classes. Firstly, the author describes the aspect related to the general adoption of the structure of *religious congregations*, which provides unequivocal evidence of the prevalence, also on the female side, of the traditional monastic model, of a vocation to religious life understood essentially as an active life devoted to charity, a synthesis between action and prayer, a commitment in the world through the assistance of others. The author's reconstruction also shows how the idea of *charity* promoted by the new religious congregations was understood not simply as a commitment to provide assistance, but also, and above all, as an educational responsibility. Indeed, the new religious congregations considered education, school and parish catechesis as the most effective

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tools for Christians' education. At the same time, school and education were also seen as the most direct and useful tool for relieving poverty and overcoming the marginalisation of the poorer classes and as the most effective tool for facilitating the successful integration of young working class men and women into society.

**Keywords:** History of Education. Religious Congregations. Christian Education. Italy. Nineteenth Century.

**Resumen.** *El artículo describe los orígenes y el desarrollo de cerca de 140 nuevas congregaciones religiosas de hombres y mujeres que surgieron en Italia en el siglo XIX. El artículo enmarca, comenzando desde la Restauración, las acciones y elecciones de las nuevas congregaciones religiosas, haciendo referencia a los nuevos escenarios que se plantearon a raíz de la experiencia revolucionaria y de los cambios introducidos en la legislación eclesiástica y en las relaciones entre Estado e Iglesia durante la época napoleónica. Asimismo, se tratan los desafíos inusuales que la Iglesia tuvo que afrontar debido tanto a la secularización de la mentalidad y de las costumbres, como al aumento de las necesidades educativas y el bienestar de la época post-revolucionaria. El autor explora algunas de las dimensiones y características de estas nuevas instituciones religiosas, la mayoría de las cuales eligió como actividad privilegiada —y a veces exclusiva— de su apostolado el ayudar a los pobres, a los enfermos y a los niños y jóvenes abandonados; la catequesis y el impulso de la vida religiosa en las parroquias y, por encima de todo, la educación e instrucción de los jóvenes de ambos sexos y de diferentes clases sociales. En primer lugar, el autor describe el aspecto relativo a la adopción general de la estructura de las congregaciones religiosas, que proporciona una evidencia inequívoca de la prevalencia, también en el lado femenino, del modelo monástico tradicional, de la vocación de la vida religiosa entendida básicamente como una vida activa dedicada a la caridad, una síntesis entre la acción y la oración, el compromiso con el mundo a través de la ayuda a los demás. La reconstrucción propuesta por el autor muestra también cómo la idea de caridad promovida por las nuevas congregaciones religiosas se entendió no solo como un compromiso de proporcionar asistencia, sino también, sobre todo, como una responsabilidad educativa. De hecho, las nuevas congregaciones religiosas consideraron la educación, la escuela y la catequesis parroquial como las herramientas más eficaces para la educación de los cristianos. Al mismo tiempo, la escuela y la educación también fueron consideradas como la herramienta más directa y funcional para paliar la pobreza y superar la marginación de las clases más pobres, así como el instrumento más eficaz para facilitar la integración de jóvenes, hombres y mujeres, de la clase obrera en la sociedad.*

**Palabras clave:** *Historia de la Educación. Congregaciones religiosas. Educación Cristiana. Italia. Siglo XIX.*

## PREMISE

In order to fully understand the spiritual orientations, the ideals and models of male and female religious life, characterizing the Italian reality during the nineteenth century, we have to analyze, first of all, the historical context in which the reorganization of ecclesiastical structures and religious life took place in Italy after the revolutionary experience.<sup>1</sup>

The resulting picture is characterized by a deep crisis, also due to the absence, after the revolutionary and Napoleonic abolitions, of the traditional structures and institutions which in previous centuries had ensured the functioning of religious life both in urban and rural centres. We refer, for example, to the abolition of the monastic communities and the traditional religious orders, to the closing of ecclesiastical seminaries, to the significant reduction in the number of parishes and to the limitations imposed on the clergy in the care of souls, to the abolition of the confraternities, and, finally, to the secularization of the conservatories and of the «holy places» for assistance and education, in which the poor people and the abandoned youth had been helped for centuries, thanks to the charity of the Church.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, we should consider the attitude of many Christians towards the «fatal events» of 1789 and their «unhappy consequences»:

The French Revolution—it was rightly pointed out—appeared as a great diabolic operation (a «deluge» according to Cardinal Consalvi; «the desolation of the universe» according to Bruno Lanteri) that disrupted the Church, thus producing a compelling need to regain lost positions, recreate the Christian social fabric, torn by Revolution, and renew the image of the Church.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Guido Verucci, «Chiesa e società nell'età della Restaurazione (1814-1830)», in *Istituzioni e società nella storia d'Italia. Dagli stati preunitari d'antico regime all'unificazione*, ed. Nicola Raponi (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1981), 399-426; and Franco Della Peruta, «Aspetti sociali dell'età della Restaurazione», in *La Restaurazione. Strutture e ideologie* (Roma: Istituto per la Storia del Risorgimento Italiano, 1976), 423-469.

<sup>2</sup> See Jean Leflon, «La crise révolutionnaire, 1789-1846», in *Histoire de l'Eglise depuis les origines jusqu'à nos jours*, ed. Augustin Fliche, Victor Martin (Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1951); and Roger Aubert, «Die Kirche zwischen Revolution und Restauration», in *Handbuch der Kirchengeschichte. VI. Die Kirche in Gegenwart*, ed. Hubert Jedin (Wien: Herder, 1971).

<sup>3</sup> Massimo Marcocchi, «Indirizzi di spiritualità ed esigenze educative nella società post-rivoluzionaria dell'Italia settentrionale», in *Chiesa e prospettive educative in Italia tra Restaurazione e Unificazione*, ed. Luciano Pazzaglia (Brescia: La Scuola, 1994), 83-84.

In such a framework, a surprising flowering of new religious institutes, especially for women, was recorded in Italy within a few decades. The available data prove the extraordinariness of the phenomenon. In fact, in the three previous centuries (16th-18th) a total of about forty-three male and female religious institutes were created, while in the nineteenth century one hundred and thirty new religious female institutions, and about 10 male ones, were established in Italy.<sup>4</sup>

In most cases, these new religious institutes were aimed largely—and sometimes exclusively—at the assistance (of poor and sick people, of the abandoned children and youth), at the catechesis and animation of religious life in the parishes and, above all, at the education of the youth of both sexes and of different social classes.<sup>5</sup>

## THE ROOTS OF THE NEW MODEL OF FEMALE RELIGIOUS LIFE IN ITALY

In a religious, political and cultural context totally different compared to that of the previous centuries, the choice of a way of life based on charity was perfectly consistent with the renewed apostolic and pastoral anxiety characterizing the Church after the dramatic revolutionary events.

The charitable commitment was considered and experienced by the new female religious institutes primarily as a support to God's redeeming

<sup>4</sup> See Giancarlo Rocca, «Le nuove fondazioni religiose femminili in Italia dal 1800 al 1860», in *Problemi di storia della Chiesa dalla Restaurazione all'Unità d'Italia* (Napoli: Dehoniane, 1985), 107-192; Giancarlo Rocca, «Il nuovo modello di impegno religioso e sociale delle congregazioni religiose nell'Ottocento in area lombarda», in *L'opera di don Luigi Guanella. Le origini e gli sviluppi nell'area lombarda* (Como: Amministrazione provinciale, 1988), 19-59; Fulvio De Giorgi, «Le congregazioni religiose dell'Ottocento nei processi di modernizzazione delle strutture statali», in *Chiesa e prospettive educative in Italia tra Restaurazione e Unificazione*, 123-150; Fulvio De Giorgi, «Le congregazioni religiose dell'Ottocento e il problema dell'educazione nel processo di modernizzazione in Italia», *Annali di Storia dell'Educazione e delle Istituzioni Scolastiche*, 1 (1994): 169-206; Roberto Sani, «Indirizzi spirituali e proposte educative dei nuovi Istituti religiosi dell'Ottocento in area lombarda», in *Chiesa, educazione e società nella Lombardia del primo Ottocento. Gli Istituti religiosi tra impegno educativo e nuove forme di apostolato*, ed. Roberto Sani (Milano: Centro Ambrosiano, 1996), 77-137; Paola Arosio, Roberto Sani, *Sulle orme di Vincenzo de'Paoli. Jeanne-Antide Thouret e le Suore della Carità dalla Francia rivoluzionaria alla Napoli della Restaurazione* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2001), 11-16.

<sup>5</sup> Roberto Sani, «Indirizzi spirituali e proposte educative dei nuovi Istituti religiosi dell'Ottocento in area lombarda», in *Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam. Istituti religiosi, educazione e scuola nell'Italia moderna e contemporanea*, Roberto Sani, (Macerata: EUM, 2009), 65-70.

plan for mankind, and, secondly, as a perpetuation in the course of history—according to a well-established theological and spiritual perspective, whose roots we are going to analyze— of the charity proved by Christ in his earthly life.<sup>6</sup>

The founders of the new religious institutes were perfectly aware of their task to witness and make concrete, through their service, God's love for mankind, so that their aims and choices were inspired by it.<sup>7</sup>

The spiritual perspective according to which the charitable commitment was basically an imitation of Jesus Christ's actions and a following of His principles found its central motif and true inspiration in the sacrifice of the Cross.<sup>8</sup>

The devotion to the Sacred Heart, the Passion of the Christ, the Five Sacred Wounds, the Three Hours of Agony of Our Lord, the Seven Words of Christ on the Cross, the Precious Blood and to Our Lady of Sorrows, which inflamed the writings and lives of the founders of the new religious institutes, clearly mirrored a spirituality centered on the mystery of Christ the Savior and Redeemer and the sacrifice of the Cross.<sup>9</sup> They also testified a strong will of atonement and apostolic rebirth, a fervent desire to atone for the sins of the world and the unbelievers' disaffection and to promote the conversion of hearts and the rebirth of faith.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Marcocchi, «Indirizzi di spiritualità ed esigenze educative», 93.

<sup>7</sup> See Luigi Ignazio Mazza, *Scritti spirituali della venerabile Maria Bartolomea Capitanio* (Modena: Tip. Pontificia ed Arcivescovile dell'Immacolata Concezione, 1904, 3 voll.), vol. I, 198; vol. III, 120; «Regole del monastero delle vergini di S. Orsola nel paese di Somasca riconosciute dall'illustrissimo e reverendissimo monsignor vescovo di Bergamo», in *Beatificationis et Canonizationis Servae Dei Catharinae Cittadini Fundatricis Soror. Ursulin. de Somascha (1801-1857), Positio super virtutibus ex officio concinnata* (Romae: Sacra Congregatio pro Causis Sanctorum. Officium Historicum Bergomen., 1989), 432-433; and Teresa Eustochio Verzeri, *Libro dei doveri. Documenti di spirito proposti alle Figlie del S. Cuore di Gesù dalla loro madre fondatrice* (Brescia: Tip. del Pio Istituto, 1844, 3 voll.), vol. III, 340.

<sup>8</sup> «Letter of Luigi Biraghi to the students», Milano 21 gennaio 1839, in Luigi Biraghi, *Lettere 1837-1844* (Milano: Reali, 1957), 26; *Regole e scritti spirituali di Maddalena di Canossa 1774-1835*, ed. Emilia Dossi (Roma: Curia Generalizia delle Suore Canossiane, 1984, 2 voll.), vol. I, 43.

<sup>9</sup> See Alfonso Prandi, «Correnti e figure della spiritualità cattolica nei sec. XIX e XX», in *La Chiesa cattolica nella storia dell'umanità* (Fossano: Editrice Esperienze, 1965-1966, 5 voll.), vol. V, 92.

<sup>10</sup> Verzeri, *Libro dei doveri*, vol. I, 56-57; Dossi, *Regole e scritti spirituali*, 246-247; «Luigi Biraghi alle Suore», Milano 7 aprile 1846, in Luigi Biraghi, *Lettere 2.° volume* (Milano: Gallo Pomi, 1967), 46; «Costituzioni per il Pio Consorzio delle Riparatrici dei SS. Cuori di Gesù e di Maria Immacolata», 1847, Archivio dell'Istituto delle Suore della Riparazione di Milano (AIRM).

It is important to underline, in this regard, that the inclination for atonement in the devout practice, despite representing, as Alfonso Prandi underlines, a «recurring theme in Christian spirituality»,<sup>11</sup> in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century acquired a new meaning, connected with the dramatic revolutionary experience and the disastrous events characterizing the life of the Church at the turn of the century.

This inclination reflected the awareness that, despite its political defeat, the French Revolution had had a profound impact on people's customs and mentality, and the «anti-Christian unrest» produced by it was far from being disappeared.

The intellectuals' religious indifference, the new rising productive classes' proud detachment from the Church, the decline of the devout practice also in the popular classes, represented the most evident and disturbing symptoms of the persisting of impiety and irreligious spirit in social life. It was necessary, in this respect, to lead men to a «total conversion bringing to a re-foundation of the religious principles of the souls» and, at the same time, to make a «work of sanctification within the Church».<sup>12</sup>

The founders of the new female religious congregations were clearly aware of these tasks: their commitment to the world, their concern for charity, their apostolate aimed at the assistance and education of the poor, the sick and the young people of the various social classes were rooted not only in the desire of a personal asceticism, but also, and above all, by a lively *sensus ecclesiae*, i.e. by a new and strong awareness of the need and urgency to restore the Church of Christ in the world for the salvation of humanity.<sup>13</sup>

The analysis of the spiritual orientations characterizing the female religious foundations of the early nineteenth century and from which their commitment in the educational and charitable field originated, should start from the analysis of the model of religious life they chose. Such an

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<sup>11</sup> Prandi, «Correnti e figure della spiritualità cattolica», 92-94.

<sup>12</sup> Marcocchi, «Indirizzi di spiritualità ed esigenze educative», 97.

<sup>13</sup> See Roberto Sani, «Spiritualità e ideali di vita religiosa in Francia e in Italia tra Rivoluzione e Restaurazione», *Annali della Facoltà di Scienze della Formazione dell'Università degli Studi di Macerata*, 1 (2005): 33-34.

approach is necessary because the idea of the state of perfection, i.e. the canonical form of religious life typical of the new female institutions, was closely related to the type of charitable apostolate of these institutions and their religious and social purposes.<sup>14</sup>

In fact, the typical structure of all the new female foundations of the nineteenth century was that of the *religious congregation*, thus clearly proving the prevailing of a religious vocation understood essentially as active life and charitable work, as a synthesis between action and contemplation, as a commitment in the world to serve the others, rather than the traditional *cloistered way of life*.<sup>15</sup>

However, this approach did not represent, in itself, a new and original phenomenon in the experience of the Church but recovered and developed a way of devout life emerged in the early decades of the sixteenth century. It, emphasizing the importance of charity as a constitutive principle in the path towards sanctity, determined totally new forms of relationship between religious female experience and the world, so that the traditional form of contemplative life in the cloister was no longer the absolute summit of the state of perfection.

However, in the aftermath of the Council of Trent (1545-1563), this process was far from being linear and peaceful. Think, for example, to the oppositions and difficulties characterizing the first development of the Society of St. Ursula after the death of the founder Angela Merici,<sup>16</sup> as well as to the misunderstandings and distrust that female religious institutes like those of the Visitation of S. Mary of François de Sales,<sup>17</sup> of the English Ladies of Mary Ward<sup>18</sup> and, above all, of the Daughters

<sup>14</sup> See Mario Bendiscioli, «Chiesa e società nei secoli XIX e XX», in *Nuove questioni di storia contemporanea*, ed. Ettore Rota (Milano: Marzorati, 1952, 2 voll.), vol. I, 841-847; Rocca, «Aspetti istituzionali e linee operative», 174-175.

<sup>15</sup> See Roberto Sani, «Carità ed educazione. L'opera delle nuove fondazioni religiose in Lombardia», in *Sub specie educationis. Studi e ricerche su istruzione, istituzioni scolastiche e processi culturali e formativi nell'Italia contemporanea*, Roberto Sani (Macerata: EUM, 2011), 277-295.

<sup>16</sup> Luciana Mariani, Elisa Tarolli, Marie Senayeve, *Angela Merici. Contributo per una biografia* (Milano: Ancora, 1986), 61-134.

<sup>17</sup> Francis Trochu, *Saint François de Sales, évêque et prince de Genève, fondateur de la Visitation Sainte-Marie* (Lyon-Paris: Vitte, 1941-1942, 2 voll.), vol. II, 128-151.

<sup>18</sup> Istituto Beata Maria Vergine, *Maria Ward e il suo Istituto secondo i testi originali* (Roma: La Valle, 1969), 48-66.

of Charity of Vincent de Paul had to face.<sup>19</sup> These institutes could not legally acquire an autonomous form until the nineteenth century, but had to settle for the status of religious communities, with only a verbal authorization, because the canon law of the time did not permit the establishment of institutes of active life, with simple vows and depending on a mother superior legitimately elected by the community. The cloistered way of life, typical of the monastic experience, was the only officially acknowledged and recognized model for female religious life.<sup>20</sup>

One of the most important factors that helped to consolidate the new model of active life, without solemn vows and seclusion, was the Napoleonic ecclesiastical legislation, the result of a series of changes in the relations between Church and State during the revolutionary phase.<sup>21</sup>

After reiterating the ban, already introduced in the revolutionary era, regarding the foundation of female religious institutes characterized by solemn vows and seclusion, Napoleon recognized as religious congregations only those communities whose aims correspond to the «social» ones established by the State: assistance and education. The State and the Church of France agreed then on the canonical form of the *congregation* as a model of religious life, whose distinctive characteristics were the temporary nature of the vote, the centralization, also from an economic point of view, of the institute, the centralization of the training period at the novitiate house, the commitment in the care of the sick people, the assistance of the poor people, the education of the youth, outside the traditional framework of the enclosure.<sup>22</sup> In this way, the female religious institutes, not only in France but also in Italy, where the Napoleonic ecclesiastical legislation was applied, were organized—through a series of intermediate steps and a process not always linear—

<sup>19</sup> José María Román, *San Vincenzo de' Paoli. Biografia* (Milano: Jaca Book, 1986), 380-412; and *Carità e missione. Convegno nazionale per i 350 anni della morte di S. Vincenzo de' Paoli e S. Luisa de Marillac (Roma 24-26 settembre 2010)* (Roma: Edizioni Vincenziane, 2012), 78-84.

<sup>20</sup> See Massimo Marcocchi, «Esperienze di vita consacrata femminile nel mondo tra '500 e '600 (Italia e Francia)», in *Vincent de Paul. Actes du Colloque International d'études Vincentiennes (Paris, 25-26 septembre 1981)* (Roma: Edizioni Vincenziane, 1983), 18-41.

<sup>21</sup> See Melchiorre Roberti, «La legislazione ecclesiastica nel periodo napoleonico», in *Chiesa e Stato. Studi storici e giuridici per il decennale della Conciliazione tra la S. Sede e l'Italia* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 1939, 2 voll.), vol. I, 253-332.

<sup>22</sup> Claude Langlois, *Le catholicisme au féminin. Les congrégations françaises à supérieure générale au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1984), 67-156.



according to the example of the male ones, whose model was the Society of Jesus: a centralized institution, headed by a General Superior directly under the Pope.<sup>23</sup>

## THE SOURCES OF SPIRITUALITY OF THE FEMALE RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The scholars of the spirituality of the eighteenth and nineteenth century showed how the female religious institutes arisen in the revolutionary and post-revolutionary era did not introduce new spiritual orientations, but drew their guidelines and models from the doctrines and experiences of the great Catholic spiritual tradition of the modern age.

Alfonso Prandi, for example, underlining the lack of creativity and originality of the new religious congregations and their founders, spoke of a kind of *spiritual koinè*, in which the contributions of the various classical schools of spirituality were blend.<sup>24</sup> More recently, Massimo Marcocchi has highlighted how the promoters of the new female religious institutes demonstrated «a poor speculative attitude» but a «strong practical sensitivity», especially because they were able to use the more peculiar and fruitful tendencies and characteristics of the spiritual heritage of the past for their own activity of assistance and education. They translated the spiritual instances of the different classical sources and of the most celebrated ascetical writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, into a really original apostolate work, fully responding to the demands and needs of the time.<sup>25</sup>

In this respect, in order to really understand the «roots» of the spirituality of the new religious institutes in the nineteenth century, we have to analyze the spiritual movements and the vast and varied ascetical literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, with particular reference to authors, works and trends particularly successful in Italy.

A major role in determining the spiritual orientations of these religious institutions was played by Ignatius of Loyola's writings and the vast and

<sup>23</sup> Rocca, «Aspetti istituzionali e linee operative nell'attività dei nuovi istituti religiosi», in *Chiesa e prospettive educative in Italia tra Restaurazione e Unificazione*, 173-200.

<sup>24</sup> Prandi, «Correnti e figure della spiritualità cattolica», 97-98.

<sup>25</sup> Marcocchi, «Indirizzi di spiritualità ed esigenze educative», 98-99.

varied ascetic production of the Society of Jesus. The spirituality typical of the Jesuits during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, based on the teachings of their founder, can be defined ascetic-voluntary.<sup>26</sup> It was characterized by the primacy given to the need to regulate the will through asceticism: i.e. through the control of internal troubles, the domination of disordered passions, the exercise of virtuous acts, the performance of constant devout practices. Hence the proposal, typical of Ignatius of Loyola, of a systematic method disciplining the inner life, whose key elements were the daily «mental prayer», the examination of conscience, the periodic practice of «spiritual exercises», and the voluntary entrustment to a director of consciousness (the «spiritual direction» ).<sup>27</sup>

Ignatius of Loyola's writings and those of the main exponents of the ascetic-voluntary orientation of the Society of Jesus expressed a radical mistrust towards the «mystic languorous», «spiritual flimsiness», «flights of fancy», «emotional abandonment» and the «contortions of consciousness» (i.e. the excessive abandonment to «scruples»), which normally resulted in doubts and melancholy, generating passivity and lack of faith. The model of spirituality proposed by the Society of Jesus was characterized by a vigorous optimism: human nature, despite the original sin, is oriented towards God and the work of Grace is integrated in this predisposition of human nature and improves it (this fundamental concept is also found in François de Sales' thought).<sup>28</sup>

The Spanish Jesuit Alfonso Rodríguez's famous work (and certainly the most widespread within Italian religious communities between the seventeenth and nineteenth century), published for the first time in Seville in 1609 and then translated and printed in Italy and elsewhere in Europe for many times, contributed to the spread of the ascetic perspective typical of the Jesuits. We refer, here, to *Practice of perfection and Christian virtues*,<sup>29</sup> which inspired the spiritual life of many of the

<sup>26</sup> Alberto De Vecchi, «Il gesuitismo», in *Correnti religiose del Sei-Settecento Veneto* (Venezia-Roma: Istituto per la collaborazione culturale, 1962), 129-224.

<sup>27</sup> Joseph De Guibert, *La spiritualité de la Compagnie de Jésus* (Romae: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1953), 49-88.

<sup>28</sup> See Ralph Dekonick, *Ad imaginem. Statuts, fonctions et usages de l'image dans la littérature spirituelle jésuite du xviiè siècle* (Genève: Droz, 2005), 49-94.

<sup>29</sup> *Exercicio de perfección y virtudes cristianas. Por el padre Alonso Rodriguez, de la Compañía de Iesús natural de Valladolid* (Sevilla: por Matias Clavijo, 1609).

founders of the new religious institutes and was often taken as a text-guide for the individual and collective meditation in the communities during the nineteenth century.<sup>30</sup>

Beside Ignatius of Loyola's Jesuit influence, the new religious institutions of the nineteenth century were also influenced by certain orientations and themes of the Salesian spiritual current, whose general principles we are going to recall. François de Sales (1567-1622), Bishop of Geneva and founder of the female religious order of the Visitation of Holy Mary,<sup>31</sup> with the *Introduction to the Devout Life* or *Philothea* (1609),<sup>32</sup> suggested a spiritual perspective characterized by a great concreteness, full of psychological wisdom and devoid of complications, based on everyday life and sense of proportion. A spiritual perspective that was not reserved only to extraordinary souls, but to men and women of all social classes and accessible by everybody through the fulfillment of the duties of life.

The key point of the Salesian teaching, then, is that Christian perfection—the holiness—is not a privileged state, the prerogative of a minority of elected people. It consists in the love for God and the other people, and is accessible by all Christians regardless of their conditions of life. In consideration of this perspective, the world becomes a place where the Christian is called to realize his own perfection; everyday life is the «normal» context in which each believer can realize his aspiration to Christian perfection.<sup>33</sup>

François de Sales believed in the harmony between the spirit of devotion and the duties of life, thus secularizing the devotion, which at the time was still heavily influenced by the model of medieval monastic spirituality (Christian perfection as an expression of the *fuga mundi*, the escapism from the world and active life for the cloister: a perspective that actually denied any possibility of Christian perfection to the experience of lay life in the world). Thus, the exemplary nature of the monastic state

<sup>30</sup> See Albert De Vassal, «Un maître de la vie spirituelle, le P. Alphonse Rodriguez», *Etudes*, 150 (1917): 297-321.

<sup>31</sup> See Étienne-Marie Lajeunie, *St. François de Sales et l'esprit salésien* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1962); René Bady, *François de Sales* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1970); André Ravier, *François de Sales. Un sage et un saint* (Paris: Nouvelle Cité, 1995).

<sup>32</sup> *Introduction à la vie devote, par Françoise de Sales* (Lyon: chez Pierre Rigaud, 1609).

<sup>33</sup> François Corrigan, *La spiritualité de François de Sales. Un chemin de vie* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1989), 48-81.

to which all Christians should adapt becomes relative. The concept of Christian perfection loses, therefore, its character of uniqueness.

According to François de Sales, the purpose of every spiritual journey was the renunciation of their own will and the Christian adaptation to God. Hence, on the one hand, the need for a new form of penance, based no more—or mainly—on the exterior mortifications (the «mortification of the flesh» typical of the medieval spirituality), but rather on the inner mortification, aimed at the destruction of the self-esteem and at the breaking of all the believer's bonds with the worldly reality and material goods; on the other, the need to acquire stronger virtues, deeply rooted in the consciousness and able to produce the lasting fruits of faith and apostolate, and to nourish the inner life through personal prayer, meditation and the participation in the religious practices of the Community.<sup>34</sup>

François de Sales was the most well-known exponent of the *devout humanism* characterized by a balanced view of the relationship between God and man, between the «divine grace» and «human nature»: the grace, in fact, does not suppress nature, but improves it. He supported the idea of continuity between nature and supernature, suggesting, in contrast to the Calvinist pessimism, an ideal of perfection based on a hopeful interaction with God. His spiritual ideas are reflected in the proposal of a warm, affectionate piety, inspired by a strong Christian optimism: charity and kindness are, in his view, the most appropriate means to bring the souls near to God; loving kindness is considered a way of life, but also a pastoral and educational style, and the most effective way to teach the faith.<sup>35</sup>

The original project of the Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary (1610) came from this peculiar ideal of perfection: François de Sales conceived it as a religious community for women devoted primarily to prayer and apostolate, really different from the models of female monasticism and not characterized by solemn vows and seclusion, that were the two key points of religious life for the canonical ideas of the time.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Hélène Michon, *Saint François de Sales. Une nouvelle mystique* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 2008), 36-88.

<sup>35</sup> Marcocchi, «Indirizzi di spiritualità ed esigenze educative», 100-104.

<sup>36</sup> «François de Sales à Philippe de Quoëx», Genève 20 juillet 1610, in *Oeuvres de Saint François de Sales, évêque de Genève et docteur de l'Eglise* (Annecy: J. Nierat, 1892-1932, édition complète, 26 voll.), vol. XIV, 328.

The Vincentian spiritual orientation had also a remarkable influence on female religious life in Italy at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with its strong and original insistence on the primacy of charity. Vincent de Paul (1581-1660),<sup>37</sup> whose biography and achievements are too well known to need further clarifications, focused on the importance of serving the poor people, starting from Pierre de Bérulle's spiritual thought, from which he derived the Christocentric dimension.<sup>38</sup>

He underlined the importance of the ideal of active charity, which permitted approaching God through the approach to poor people. He underlined that «the poor people are dying of hunger and are in trouble» and that Christians cannot be indifferent to this, since Christ came to announce the Gospel exactly for the poor people.<sup>39</sup>

Vincent de Paul introduced a series of spiritual themes that inspired the thinkers of the nineteenth century and that nourished the spirituality of many ecclesiastics and founders of religious congregations.<sup>40</sup> He pointed out that the Christian was called to «continue» the work of Christ in the world and that the poor people represented the image of the «poor and suffering» Christ so that «to serve the poor is to serve Christ himself», as he wrote.<sup>41</sup>

Finally, speaking about the spiritual orientations that influenced the choices of the educational apostolate of the new religious institutes in the nineteenth century, it is worth mentioning Alfonso Maria de' Liguori and the Redemptorist tradition. According Alfonso Maria de' Liguori (1696-1787), founder of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (1732) and bishop of S. Agata dei Goti (1762-1775),<sup>42</sup> the spiritual perfection was

<sup>37</sup> See José M. Román, *St. Vincent de Paul. A Biography* (Hertford: Melisende, 1999); Marie-Joëlle Guillaume, *Vincent de Paul. Un saint au Grand Siècle* (Paris: Editions Perrin, 2015).

<sup>38</sup> See Paul Cochois, *Bérulle et l'École française* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1963); Raymond Deville, *L'École française de spiritualité* (Paris: Desclée, 1987), 71-126.

<sup>39</sup> Massimo Marcocchi, *La spiritualità tra giansenismo e quietismo nella Francia del Seicento* (Roma: Studium, 1983), 56-64.

<sup>40</sup> Luigi Mezzadri, «Quando la legge libera il dono», in *La Regola delle Figlie della Carità*, ed. Luigi Mezzadri, Miguel Perez Flores (Milano: Jaca Book, 1986), 28-31.

<sup>41</sup> Vincenzo de' Paoli, «Conferenza del 9 febbraio 1653», in *San Vincenzo de' Paoli. Conferenze spirituali alle Figlie della Carità*, ed. Luigi Mezzadri (Roma: Centro liturgico vincenziano, 1980), 657-665.

<sup>42</sup> See Théodule Rey-Mermet, *Un homme pour les sans-espoir. Alphonse de' Liguori (1696-1787)* (Paris: Nouvelle Cité, 1987); Giuseppe Orlandi, «Sant'Alfonso Maria de' Liguori e l'ambiente missionario napoletano nel Settecento», *Spicilegium Historicum*, 38 (1990): 5-195; *La recezione del pensiero alfon-*

a life of charitable love, i.e «to join our will to the will of God», to direct our inner experience and our works towards Jesus Christ, abandoning any involvement with the outer world.

According to Alfonso Maria de' Liguori, the principle of Christian life was the «universal call to holiness», which was not a privilege reserved to a few chosen people, but an ideal and specific task for all the categories of people, perfectly in line with François de Sales's thought. Everyone, in fact, is called to choose his vocation in the world and, within that vocation, to fulfill his peculiar journey towards Christian perfection.<sup>43</sup>

The «way of love», proposed by Alfonso Maria de' Liguori, derived from the awareness of God's greatness and mercy and invited men to lead a holy life and to work for the creation of God's kingdom. Alfonso, inspired by Bérulle, recommended the contemplation of the «mysteries of Jesus» life (birth, passion, death and resurrection).<sup>44</sup>

Alfonso Maria de' Liguori not only clarified the essence of Christian perfection, but showed how such perfection could be implemented. His idea of spiritual life was deeply concrete. Among the practical means for the pursuit of perfection suggested to the Christians, there were the mortification, the frequency of the sacraments, the community and mental prayer, following Ignatius of Loyola's principles.<sup>45</sup>

The faith itinerary proposed by Alfonso also considered human frailty thus revealing a deep sense of proportion; it was the result of the experience he gained in his long career as a missionary and pastor. Balance, psychological wisdom, dislike of the excesses and rigidities were the characteristics of a spiritual perspective largely inspired by the ascetic tradition of the Society of Jesus and François de Sales's writings, re-elaborated in a particularly effective synthesis. Liguori's works, in this regard, proposed «a warm, lovable pity, [...] accessible to all, far from the

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siano nella Chiesa. Atti del congresso in occasione del terzo centenario della nascita di S. Alfonso Maria de' Liguori (Roma 5-7 marzo 1997) (Roma: Collegium S. Alfonsi de Urbe, 1998).

<sup>43</sup> *Pratica di amar Gesù Cristo... Data fuori dall'Illustriss., e Reverendiss. Monsign. D. Alfonso de Liguori ... Per utile delle anime, che desiderano di accertar la salute eterna, e di camminare per la via della perfezione* (Bassano: Remondini, 1768).

<sup>44</sup> Gabriele De Rosa, «S. Alfonso e il secolo dei lumi», *Rassegna di Teologia*, 28 (1987): 13-31.

<sup>45</sup> Alfonso Amarante, «Dinamismo pastorale di S. Alfonso nelle missioni rurali del '700», *Aspenas*, 12 (1972): 197-215.

austere and elitist Jansenist character and from the cold rationalism of the Enlightenment».<sup>46</sup> No wonder, so, that these works —characterized by an anti-rigorous and genuinely popular idea of faith and religious practice— heavily influenced many of the founders of the new religious congregations of the nineteenth century, in their idea of spiritual life and in their charitable apostolate.<sup>47</sup>

Moreover, in Alfonso Maria de' Liguori's thought —and in the whole spiritual tradition of the Council of Trent and after (from Ignatius of Loyola to François de Sales and Vincent de Paul)— there was a sort of primacy of active life on the contemplative and apostolic one, following a perspective that marked a real turning point respect to the spiritual needs of medieval Christianity: it is necessary to live in the world, rather than leave it because of its sins (the *fuga mundi*), in order to redeem it, continuing the work of Christ the Saviour and Redeemer in the course of history. This idea of the Christian task in the course history was then adopted by the Catholicism of the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. We can affirm, so, that the more sensitive and committed religious spirits of the Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary period (bishops, priests, religious men and women of the new congregations arisen in this complex and difficult political and cultural climate) found a further reason in supporting this primacy in the urgent need to bring humanity near to God.<sup>48</sup>

#### THE NEW FACE OF CHARITY. THE EDUCATIONAL EFFORTS OF THE NEW FEMALE RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The new religious orders arisen in Italy in the nineteenth century were characterized by a strong need for charity: a charity considered not only as assistance, but also, and especially, as education, in the awareness that «education is an outstanding form of charity».<sup>49</sup> The school, in

<sup>46</sup> Marcocchi, «Indirizzi di spiritualità ed esigenze educative», 104-105.

<sup>47</sup> Sani, «Indirizzi spirituali e proposte educative dei nuovi Istituti religiosi dell'Ottocento in area lombarda», 112-113.

<sup>48</sup> Giovanni Velocci, *Crisi e rinascita della spiritualità. Dal Sette all'Ottocento* (Roma: Studium, 1982), 27-28.

<sup>49</sup> Marcocchi, «Indirizzi di spiritualità ed esigenze educative», 83.

this respect, was conceived as the most effective tool for the Christian education of the new generations, and this education, in its turn, was considered the most appropriate way to reform society, to renew the costumes, to rebuild the Christian social and civil fabric torn by the rationalism of the Enlightenment and the revolutionary and Napoleonic events.

But education and school were also regarded as the most direct and practical way to relieve poverty and break the isolation and marginalization of the poor and neglected classes: the most effective tool to promote positive integration of the young men and women of the working classes into society.<sup>50</sup>

It is true, however, that in Italy in the nineteenth century there were a lot of thinkers and scholars of pedagogy who underlined the need of a social and educational renewal —we refer here to personalities like Ferrante Aporti, Raffaello Lambruschini, Gino Capponi, Niccolò Tommaseo, just to mention the most important ones<sup>51</sup>— but it is equally true that there is no trace of the so-called *cultured pedagogy* in the work of the new religious congregations and in their founders' writings. We can affirm, in this regard, that the religious institutions arisen in the nineteenth century were totally unrelated to the experimental pedagogy and the highly innovative theories developed in the educational field in those years.<sup>52</sup>

It is necessary to analyze other aspects of the educational proposal of the new religious institutions in order to fully understand their novelty and their specific perspective. We refer, in particular, to the objectives and models that influenced the religious men's educational work and their choices; as well as the varied types of schools and educational institutions promoted by them, which testify their effort to organize, with great flexibility and pragmatism, the education on the basis of the specific needs and requirements of the different social classes.

<sup>50</sup> Sani, «Indirizzi spirituali e proposte educative dei nuovi Istituti religiosi dell'Ottocento in area lombarda», 113-114.

<sup>51</sup> See Angiolo Gambaro, «La pedagogia italiana nell'età del Risorgimento», in *Nuove questioni di storia della pedagogia* (Brescia: La Scuola, 1977, 3 voll.), vol. II, 612-775.

<sup>52</sup> See Luciano Pazzaglia, «Chiesa, società civile ed educazione nell'Italia post-napoleonica», in *Chiesa e prospettive educative in Italia tra Restaurazione e Unificazione*, 45-50.



A confirm of the ability of the new institutions to adapt their educational work on the real and most common needs of the contemporary society, is the fact that they did not compete with the State initiative in the scholastic field, but they worked in a complementary way with it, especially by being committed —through a wide range of institutions and initiatives— in those areas and sectors where the State and public presence was lacking or non-existent.<sup>53</sup>

For example, they were interested in elementary female education, much less developed and widespread than the male one, especially in small towns and agricultural and mountain areas. In this regard, one of the most important religious congregation was undoubtedly the *School of Charity*, intended primarily for working class girls, but also for those of the privileged classes, in those places where there were no other schools for girls. The Schools of Charity, arisen in different Italian regions since the early decades of the nineteenth century, were largely based on the female public and parish schools held in the eighteenth century by the congregated or *Humble* Ursulines and by other religious communities (*Maestre Pie, Oblate* etc.), but differed from them in some aspects and basic characteristics. First of all, they provided a wider and more well-structured education than that of the schools for poor girls of the *ancien régime*: for example, the *Schools of Charity* included not only the catechism, the readings and the so-called «female works», but also the teaching of writing (that in this period became a full part of the *curriculum* for working class young people) and the «basics of arithmetic» (including the four basic arithmetic operations and some other practical knowledge).<sup>54</sup>

The teaching of «female works» itself, was a training for the female professions required by the new urban production structures of the nineteenth century. The Schools of Charity acquired, so, the dual nature of institutions aimed, at the same time, at giving primary education and at teaching a job. Their purpose was twofold: on the one hand, they provided the poor young people with the knowledge and skills necessary

<sup>53</sup> Sani, «Spiritualità e ideali di vita religiosa in Francia e in Italia tra Rivoluzione e Restaurazione», 24-29.

<sup>54</sup> See Luisa Dodi, «Il “metodo canossiano”: la scuola popolare», in *Maddalena di Canossa e la Chiesa di Milano*, ed. Edoardo Bressan (Milano: NED, 1990), 138-151.

to find a job and live honestly; on the other, they gave them a solid moral and religious education, so that they could become good mothers, able in their turn to raise and educate their children in a Christian way.<sup>55</sup>

Another important area in which the new religious orders were engaged during the nineteenth century was that of the professional education for craftsmen. The creation of schools and workshops for the professional education was connected with the awareness of the substantial inadequacy of traditional educational institutions (churches, festive congregations etc.) not only to cope with the new and increased training needs of the poor abandoned youth, but also to preserve this youth from the dangers and the harmful influences of the environment they came from.

However, the will to safeguard young people from the dangers of the city and the moral and spiritual threats represented by workplaces, offering them a shelter and the opportunity to learn a job and receive a complete civil and religious education in a protected environment, represented only one aspect of the training offer of the new religious institutions of the nineteenth century.<sup>56</sup>

Another important aspect concerns the meaning given to the job in the educational process of the poor and abandoned youth. For the founders of the new religious institutions the job, in particular that of the craftsman, was the first and most effective tool for the personal and social growth of the subject: it was, in fact, not only the first and more effective means to give young people—even if problematic—an inner discipline and a regular and orderly lifestyle, but also a source of virtues and values (tenacity, precision, commitment, responsibility, constructive attitude, self-confidence and so on), as well as a tool for their successful integration in society.<sup>57</sup> In this regard, the rehabilitation of disadvantaged

<sup>55</sup> See Simonetta Soldani, «Il libro e la matassa. Scuole per “lavori donneschi” nell’Italia da costruire», in *L’educazione delle donne. Scuola e modelli di vita femminile nell’Italia dell’Ottocento*, ed. Simonetta Soldani, (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1989), 87-129.

<sup>56</sup> See for example Alberto Monticone, «Lavoro, risorse e nuova società nell’età della Restaurazione», in *La storia dei poveri. Pauperismo e assistenza nell’età moderna*, ed. Alberto Monticone, (Roma: Studium, 1985), 255-265; Giuseppe Rossi, «Don Bosco e Lodovico Pavoni. Le «officine» a Valdocco e a S. Barnaba», *Bollettino interno della Congregazione Religiosa dei Figli di Maria Immacolata-Pavoniani*, 2 (1988): 76-106.

<sup>57</sup> Roberto Sani, «Istruzione e istituzioni educative nella Roma pontificia (1815-1870)», in *Chiesa e prospettive educative in Italia tra Restaurazione e Unificazione*, 728-732.

and neglected young people through Christian education and their integration into the social class of craftsmen, achieved the dual purpose of making these young people «religious, [and] useful for the Society and State»; and, at the same time, of stopping the dominating «moral decline».<sup>58</sup>

The active charity» of the new religious foundations of the nineteenth century was also a characteristic of the nursery schools and institutions for orphans and abandoned children. The Church had been involved in this field for centuries and, in the eighteenth century—in the wake of the reforms of the house of Habsburg—public initiatives and state intervention in this sector multiplied.<sup>59</sup> After the Restoration, several female religious institutes were interested in this field, and their initiatives, despite mainly characterized by an assistance attitude, were really different than those of the charitable institutions of the *ancien régime*, also because they not only provided assistance for the orphaned and abandoned children but they gave them a complete civil and religious education, aimed to promote personal growth and successful integration into society.<sup>60</sup>

The work carried out by the religious institutions engaged in the rehabilitation of the helpless and corrupted girls and young women was equally important and innovative. Here, more than elsewhere, we can find a real change compared to the proposals and initiatives of the pre-revolutionary period. The primacy given to the educational dimension over the assistance, the abandonment of repressive and coercive practices typical of traditional institutions, the introduction of forms and methods of personalized education and of rehabilitation practices focused on civil and religious education and professional training, and, finally, the

<sup>58</sup> «Lodovico Pavoni a S.M. l'Imperatore Francesco I», settembre 1825, in *Raccolta Ufficiale di Documenti e Memorie d'Archivio*, ed. Congregazione Religiosa dei Figli di Maria Immacolata (Brescia: Opera Pavoniana, 1958, 2 voll.), vol. II, 90.

<sup>59</sup> Michele Monaco, «Le iniziative di carità e l'attività sociale della Chiesa nell'età moderna (1517-1815)», in *La Chiesa cattolica nella storia dell'umanità*, ed. Paolo Brezzi (Fossano: Editrice Esperienze, 1965, 5 voll.), vol. IV, 317-364.

<sup>60</sup> Mariagrazia Gorni, Laura Pellegrini, *Un problema di storia sociale. L'infanzia abbandonata in Italia nel secolo XIX* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1974); Edoardo Bressan, *Povertà ed assistenza in Lombardia nell'età napoleonica* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1985); Gabriella Botti, Laura Guidi, Lucia Valenzi, *Povertà e beneficenza tra Rivoluzione e Restaurazione* (Napoli: Morano, 1990); Sergio Onger, *La città dolente. Povertà e assistenza a Brescia durante la Restaurazione* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1993); Marco Bona Castellotti, Edoardo Bressan, Carlo Fornasieri, Paola Vismara, *Cultura, religione e trasformazione sociale. Milano e la Lombardia dalle riforme all'unità* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2001).

adoption, in the educational relationship, of a model based on the idea of family and community and an educational style marked by kindness, compassion and dialogue, represented the peculiar aspects characterizing the work of the new religious institutes.<sup>61</sup>

The charitable and educational activity of the new congregations of the nineteenth century was particularly lively and important in the sector of the education of the deaf, blind and mentally deficient people, in which the state and public initiative was, even after the national unification, totally inadequate. From the early years of the nineteenth century, in the wake of the achievements of France, Spain, Germany and Belgium, the new institutes opened schools, boarding schools and shelters for deaf people of both sexes, starting a considerable educational initiative, opened to methodological and didactic innovations. Beyond the greater or lesser adoption of the new teaching methodologies, it is important to underline that the efforts made in this area by the religious institutions were characterized by a specific attention given to all the aspects of the personality of the young disabled and to their effective reintegration, through education and work, in the social life.<sup>62</sup>

Finally, the education and training of the aristocratic girls is a field in which the role of the new religious foundations of the nineteenth century was considerably important.<sup>63</sup> Think, for example, to the boarding schools of the Ursulines of S. Charles and of the Marcellines in Milan, which educated the young girls of the rising urban bourgeoisie. It was a class established in the period of the Napoleonic power which took advantages from its socio-economic and administrative reforms: a class

<sup>61</sup> See for example Emma Caterino, «La risposta religiosa di Madre Orsenigo ai segni dei tempi», in *Una spiritualità riparatrice in un secolo di storia. Atti del convegno tenuto a Milano dal 24 al 29 agosto 1981* (Milano: Suore della Riparazione, 1982), 26-38; and Chiara Bigalli, *La Casa di Nazareth. Origini e vicende (1859-1900)* (Milano: NED, 1988), 87-106.

<sup>62</sup> Roberto Sani, Paola Patrizia Saladini, Severino Fabriani. *Un ecclesiastico ed educatore nella Modena della Restaurazione* (Roma: Città Nuova, 2001); Roberto Sani, «L'educazione dei sordomuti in Italia prima e dopo l'Unità. Itinerari, esperienze, proposte», in *L'educazione dei sordomuti nell'Italia dell'Ottocento. Istituzioni, metodi, proposte formative*, ed. Roberto Sani (Torino: SEI, 2008), 3-38; Simonetta Polenghi, *Educating the cripples. The Pious institute for rickets sufferers of Milan and its transformations 1874-1937* (Macerata: EUM, 2009), Fabio Bocci, *Una mirabile avventura. Storia dell'educazione dei disabili da Jean Itard a Giovanni Bollea* (Firenze: Le Lettere, 2011).

<sup>63</sup> See Roberto Sani, «The Education of Female élites in Nineteenth Century Papal Rome. Innovative Contributions of the Society of the Sacred Heart of Madeleine-Sophie Barat», *Estudios Sobre Educación*, XXIII (2012): 83-98.

not prejudicially hostile, but in some respects far from the Church, with a lay outlook and a liking for liberal ideas. The Milanese religious institutions offered to these girls a civil and religious training far richer and more well-structured than that provided by female public primary schools, and this explains the immediate and growing success of the boarding schools of the two congregations, whose educational proposal fulfilled the aspirations of the new classes to emerge even from a cultural point of view.

But the Ursulines and Marcellines also promoted, among the young people of the Milanese bourgeoisie, a peculiar and modern ideal of woman, a model of an austere, essential woman, without frivolousness, far from the typical image promoted by the traditional female boarding schools for the upper classes. In contrast with the traditional models, the boarding schools of the two Milanese religious institutes pursued, in their educational process, the ideal of a woman capable of reconciling her duties as a good wife and mother with those of a Christian committed in the apostolate and charity activities of the parish: a woman driven by a «solid piety» and «manly virtue», able to educate morally and spiritually the other people «both at home and outside».<sup>64</sup>

The goal was to provide the young women of the upper classes with a deep awareness not only of their family duties, but also of the social ones and, in particular, of their specific responsibilities in the promotion of the faith and the restoration of the Christian principles in society. This educational perspective was perfectly in line with the cultural and spiritual needs of the post-revolutionary society, charging the woman—the woman of the ruling classes, of course—with a task far more difficult than in the past and not only within the society but also, in particular, within the Church.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Mariateresa Castelli, «Le proposte educative delle suore Orsoline di San Carlo nel periodo della Restaurazione», in *Chiesa, educazione e società nella Lombardia del primo Ottocento*, 165-214; Paola Patrizia Saladini, «Le Marcelline e l'educazione delle giovani di condizione civile nella Milano asburgica», in *Chiesa, educazione e società nella Lombardia del primo Ottocento*, 215-250. See also Paolo Ghedda, «Per una storia generale della fioritura delle Orsoline dopo l'età napoleonica», in *La risposta femminile ai nuovi bisogni dell'età borghese. La rinascita delle compagnie e degli istituti religiosi delle Orsoline fra Ottocento e primo Novecento*, ed. Giampiero Belotti (Brescia: Centro Mericiano, 2012), 41-54.

<sup>65</sup> Sani, «Indirizzi spirituali e proposte educative dei nuovi Istituti religiosi dell'Ottocento in area lombarda», 128-130.

In conclusion, the renewal of the traditional forms of religious life of the new female congregations of the nineteenth century responded to two different sets of problems. On the one hand, in fact, it was aimed at solving the serious crisis produced by the abolitions carried out in the period of enlightened absolutism and in the years of Jacobin and Napoleonic domination and the various difficulties that, in the aftermath of 1815, characterized the restoration of the ancient religious orders and monasteries in the various dioceses; on the other, such a renewal was an attempt to adapt the pastoral and educational Church initiative to the deep economic and social changes and to the new political and cultural atmosphere of the nineteenth century.<sup>66</sup> ■

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<sup>66</sup> See Giancarlo Rocca, «Istituti religiosi in Italia tra Otto e Novecento», in *Clero e società nell'Italia contemporanea*, ed. Mario Rosa (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1992), 207-256.