

# **Mother G erine Fabre and her work (1881 – 1887)**

Study of some documents



**Roma 2001**



**Sr. M. Germana Pandolfo O. P.**

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## Presentation

*In the climate of an increasing interest, love and veneration for our beloved Foundress, Mother Gérine Fabre, that has kept on growing during the past decade, I am glad to offer to all those who love this humble and audacious woman, this present historical research, made with filial loving care of Sr. M. Germana Pandolfo, o.p.*

*The attention paid to the documents, source of rigorous and truthful knowledge, together with an affectionate veneration for Mother Gérine, appears through every page of this book. In fact, Sr. M. Germana, assisted also by her passionate interest for history, keeps growing in love and admiration for mother Gérine as she progresses in the discovery of her humble and obedient heroism. Several times in the following pages we read of her regret for many documents have not yet been found and studied . We read also of her pressing invitation to see that such researches may be continued, with the aim of throwing full light on events, situations and persons.*

*It is a great desire of Sr. M. Germana, as well as of all of us, daughters of Mother Gérine, to arrive at catching the objective meaning of the human and spiritual life parable of our dear mother; as follower of Dominic and Catherine, as a woman made vulnerable by the compassion assimilated at the feet of Our Lady of Sorrow. I am very grateful to our sister for the efforts in her journeys, for her punctual study, for the convincing stimulus she offers us to continue our researches, so that the personality of Mother Gérine may be drawn in its integrity and neatness from the archives and the yellowed pages. This study could be defined as a “Volume of Transition”, not in the*

*sense of wanting to play it down, but because of its connection with the past, from where it derives strength and life, with the future, because of its impelling need to complete the researches of the historical sources that will, hopefully, lead to the emergence of the life and holiness of Mother Gérine in their fullness. While thanking Sr. M. Germana once again and inviting the daughters of Mother Gérine to know better, thanks to these pages, the one who generated us, I wish to praise the Blessed Trinity, who incessantly works in history and continuously offers us the gift of discovering the marks of his love in our human events, even when the heroine is a woman who defined herself as one who is “Less than nothing”.*

Rome, 21 April 2001

Mother Viviana Ballarin, O.P.

*Prioress General*

## Introduction

After reading the book by Monsignor G. Bonhomme, “The Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena, Albi”, out of various reflections flowing out of my vibrating feelings, two prevailing questions remained, which are not exhaustively answered by the quoted book.

What was the purpose of the author in writing the above mentioned book?

What are the sources of this book? He never knew mother Géline personally since he became chaplain of the Albi Community in 1902.

Did the sisters living there not remember anything else besides the facts they narrated to Fr. Bonhomme ?

The second question, connected to the first one, concerns the person of Mother Géline, who does not appear as the protagonist of many situations of which just a few hints are given. The image of the Foundress comes out exhaustively traced from the spiritual and charismatic point of view, but the Author says very little about her contacts and personal relations with the Ecclesiastical Authorities. Above all, he doesn't bring into focus the first foundation in the local Church of Toulouse. One gets the impression that, on this and some other themes, the narration is fragmentary, sandwiched by alternating silences and reticence: From the very beginning her capacity as Foundress seems to be eclipsed and sometimes she does not appear as the protagonist of various foundations, or as a weaver of the Family unity.

Concerning the first question, passing over and overlooking situations of historical value, like the reference to the juridical practice for the foundation of the Congregation, which Mother Géline, like all other Foundresses of her

time, was not well acquainted with, I think it suffices to notice that the Author reveals not only a naive prudence as a historian, but also some sort of incompetence. This is proved, for instance, by his solemn statement that the Albi Congregation had been canonically erected on 2<sup>nd</sup> September, 1852, a news that is not and could not be exact, as we shall see later.

However, we must say that, according to the hagiography canon of his time, he follows the proposed finality of transmitting the edifying image of a woman to the future generations of her daughters, on the occasion of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Foundation of this Religious Family. In fact, in a register of the Saint Flour Diocesan Archive we read:

“XXIX: The history of the locality of Saint- Martial, after the Revolution, does not contemplate anything noteworthy. XXX: The parish has had neither a priest, nor missionaries, nor important persons. As religious, there are the two Fabre Sisters of the Order of St. Francis (sic!), one of whom, Catherine, is the Foundress of this Order in Toulouse. Her life is so admirable that now Monsignor Bonhomme, chaplain of this community, has been entrusted with the task to enhance, to give prominence to the virtues of her beautiful soul”.<sup>1</sup>

We can't deny his success in doing it. Moreover, he has shown off his erudition with lengthy digressions on the Order of St. Dominic and on historical patriotic episodes.

Noteworthy and precious is the insistence on some chronicle matters about the community life and the apostolic activities of the first daughters of Mother Géline. We are impressed by the constant warnings of Mother Géline who exhorts them to seek the aim of their nursing the sick, that is the salvation of souls. We are touched emotionally by the frequent scenes of community life in which M. Géline acts as a real mother who encourages her “petites” and urges them to collaborate, with love and sacrifice, for instance, in the preparation of the meagre meals, not to say poor, in the performance of material types of work, in atmosphere of love and sacrifice. It is very important the fact that, with just some verbal information, given by the Albi Sisters and integrated with scanty documents, the Author succeeds in drawing, or better in carving the spiritual profile of our Foundress along with her personal charisma well rooted on that of Dominic.

Thoroughly permeated with the ardour of St. Catherine of Siena, patroness of the Dominican Third Order, Mother Gérine welcomed into her compassionate heart the whole humanity needful of Redemption and salvation. She did this mainly because she had fallen in love with the evangelical ideal of Dominic, which she had assimilated through the Rules of the Third Order and deepened in the Contemplation of Our Lady of Sorrow, who expresses her boundless maternal compassion by holding the Body of her Son, who died for the sins of the world.

On this background, as in a filigree, we contemplate the work of the Holy Spirit who conquers her soul and sows in it the seed of a special gift, the charisma of a foundress. The developing and concretizing of this gift made her a mother of souls, an apostle of evangelical charity and mercy. We, full right heir of this gift received by her, continue to bring it to fulfilment through the human historical events, with our existential participation in the mystery of salvation in Christ.

In view of the ever growing desire to know the person of Mother Gérine in a better and deeper way, we have started, both in France and in Italy, our archives researches of documents, of news useful for the reconstruction of a biography historically based, as well as to throw some light on the shadows that envelop relevant events of her life. This urgent task, which has involved both the Albi and our Congregation, was entrusted to Sr. Jeanine Raynal and myself. After several meetings on the work, held in Italy and in France according to a calendar that Sr. Jeanine had prepared beforehand with the collection of the found documents, already tidied and presented in French to the Albi General Chapter, 1999<sup>2</sup>, I felt that it was my task now to write down my personal reconstruction of the life and the works of Mother Gérine, by using the same documents.

Actually, some writings have helped me to go deeper into the personality of Mother Gérine, and have enabled me to formulate some hypotheses in confirmation of the personal intuition I had in mind about her behaviour in given situations, as well as to understand the reason why difficulties arose in her relations with some Bishops of France on problems concerning the foundation and management of her communities.

I think that, somehow and as true as possible, the motive of her resignation

can ultimately be considered to be the consequence of a tension between the local and the universal church, between Institution and Charisma. Mother Gérine might have been sacrificed by the Bishop of Albi because of his tendency to autonomous administration, claimed by the Gallican Church with respect to the Church of Rome.

The material, found in the archives so far, is not complete, particularly the one concerning this matter, but we can continue the researches; once we succeed in deepening this and some other difficult events, we could proceed in writing a biography theologically based and historically critical. To do this, according to my modest suggestion, we need the competence of a writer who proves to be a good Theologian and a competent historian.

My work wants to be a modest biographic profile woven in large-mesh through some excerpts from the documents that are found in the archives of both Congregations and from others found in the AGOP, in the Diocesan archives, in those of the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life, or from Societies of apostolic life.

Mine is not a work parallel, but complementary to and differentiated from that of Sr. Jeanine in the sense that it does not juxtapose nor quotes the documents in their entirety, but it seeks to interpret them. My tentative may look ambitious, but it is a tentative urged by love and by the hope that it may prove to be a useful solicitation to continue the study and further researches on Mother Gérine, especially in France.

The division of this weft into a schematic form, perhaps questionable but drawn out of real facts, can give an idea of Mother Gérine's earthly life pattern, as Foundress of our Congregation.

PRE-HISTORY: Saint-Martial, 1811-1830;  
Chaudesaigues, 1830-1842;

PROTO-HISTORY: Toulouse, 1842-1852

HISTORY: Albi, 1852-1879  
Carcassonne, 1880-1887  
Separation of the houses in Italy-1879-1887.

**PRE-HISTORY**  
THE FRATERNITY  
OF THE DOMINICAN LAYTHIRD ORDER

***Saint-Martial (1811-1830)***

Saint Martial, in the Cantal territory, belonging to the Chaudesaigues Canton (District), Saint - Flour Diocese, in the South of France, is the town where Françoise Catherine Fabre lived till she was 19 years old. She was born on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1811, at Saint-Geniez d'Olt, where her parents were temporarily living for the sake of work.

At schooling age, after her First Holy Communion, she was sent to a boarding house run by the Presentation Sisters of Mary at Chaudesaigues. There she learnt reading and writing, but above all she learnt how to love the “Madonna della Pietà”, Our Lady of Sorrow, whose compassionate expression she carried in her heart to be the soul of her apostolic life. She stayed in the boarding for a short time because, being the second born daughter out of five sisters and two brothers, her mother needed her help to look after the little ones.

***Chaudesaigues (1830-1842)***

The young Françoise Catherine went back to this town in 1830 and in September of the same year, she became a Novice in the flourishing Fraternity of the Dominican Third Order. In May 1831, she emitted her first profession and was given the religious name which she simplified into Sr. Gérine. The Tertiaries were called Sisters and wore a habit that distinguished them from

the other women. They did not have community life, but would have periodical sharing of prayer and formation. The Fraternity itself was called Congregation.

The almost twelve years that Sr. Géline shared with her sister, Sr. M. Louise, were like a long novitiate in which she studied and assimilated the “Rule of the Third Order of St.Dominic”, thus assuming the spirituality of the Patriarch to the point of making it her own. The Rule, written in the XIII century, had been approved several times by the Holy Fathers and had been re-printed at Saint-Flour in 1817. It became the “Magna Charta”, the Great Charter, which inspired the life and the leadership of Mother Géline.

The phase of Chaudesaigues carries a remarkable importance in the life of Mother Géline since it marked her formation as religious and as a foundress. Under the guidance of Tertiary Priests, Directors of the Fraternity, she had the chance of consolidating her Christian Virtues according to the Gospel, and exercised herself in the works of charity, mainly in the assistance to the sick, an activity that offered her the possibility of earning some livelihood and of helping the poor, according to the prescription of the Rule. It was during this period that she came to know St. Catherine, patroness of the Tertiaries<sup>3</sup>.

In this climate of intense fervour, of contemplation and apostolate, lived with generous dedication, Sr. Géline, like the Virgin of Nazareth, received the gift of the Spirit and became, virtually, the spiritual mother of many young women who welcomed the call. In fact, conquered by the spirituality of St.Dominic, she decided to consecrate herself totally to God and, guided by Providence, she opened her first community of Regular Tertiary sisters in Toulouse, welcoming from her own land young women whom, with the example of her life, she taught how to live as religious and how to donate themselves to the service of their brothers and sisters with the will of leading them to Christ.

## **PROTO-HISTORY**

### **Community life of the Regular Third Order**

#### ***Toulouse (1842-1852)***

By inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who had generated in her the desire of following the example of St. Dominic, Mother Gérine, in 1842 went to Toulouse where her sister, Sr. M. Louise, had gone two years before. The two young sisters, helped by a benefactress, rented a flat at Vieux Raisin street, near the house of Pierre Seilhan, where St. Dominic had gathered his first followers and had given birth to the Order.

Soon other young women from Cantal followed her. Among them were two more Fabre sisters who would be called Sr. Dominique and Sr. Vincent. Thus the first community of the Dominican Regular Third Order came to be erected with the name of Congregation of St. Catherine, as Mother Gérine herself wrote 35 years later to the Archbishop of Fermo and all the Bishops in whose dioceses her daughters were working.

“...The first House was founded in Toulouse in 1840 and it has pleased Providence to make it fruitful. We now count 33 communities : 17 in France, 13 in Italy and 3 in America. The Constitutions which, with the approval of the Archbishop of Albi, we added to the Rule of the Third Order of St. Dominic, have already a certain consistency derived by experience, but they still need the consistency conferred by the Supreme authority of the Holy See”<sup>4</sup>.

We find no Constitutive Act of the Congregation in Toulouse and it would be useless to look for it. We are here just at the dawn of a Congregation born without any support and without the blessing of any Bishop, but only through the interior impulse of a Dominican Tertiary who will linger in the persuasion

of being able to found and to govern her Congregation only with the Rule of the Third Order.<sup>5</sup> The approval of the Bishop, instead, is the recognition and the ratification not only of a fundamental charisma, but also of the existence of a given experience of Religious Life, governed by Constitutions normally compiled by the Foundress or by others in her stead.

Now it is unthinkable that Mother Gérine, without any authoritative guide at this moment, could have compiled a text of Constitutions. Moreover, she considered it to be superfluous, deeply convinced as she was that the Rule of the Third Order, which she loved and observed, would answer also the exigencies of the Community Life in the Congregation she was founding.

Moreover, as already mentioned, she did not have any priest to enlighten and to assist her in the process of foundation which, according to her, was the natural on going process of the life at Chaudesaigues.

Endowed with untamable faith and a daring, unassuming courage, without human calculations, she undertook in Toulouse the nursing activity, keeping in mind the Dominican mission of the salvation of souls. Zeal and charity were the unique leaders of her steps. Her faith was not manifested directly in the proclamation of the Word or in the service of the truth, but rather in fulfilling the good as a woman consecrated to the works of charity; she actively invested all the gifts and talents received from God and made them to bear fruit. Her feminine intuition and motherly attitude were translated into service to her neighbours in whatever allowed field.

Unfortunately, to open her way in Toulouse was not without difficulties, but Providence came to the rescue and she finished by securing a field of activity to her first daughters, whom very soon she started sending also beyond Toulouse, thus giving in to the demands which she did answer in spite of the involved sacrifices.

The nursing activity which the Dominican Tertiary sisters undertook in Toulouse was a source of their first difficulties. The Bishop, Monsignor d' Astros, who probably did not know that the community was just being born, fearing that the sisters of Hope, who had been called by him to assist the infirm at domicile, would not stand the competition, did not give his consensus to their settling

in his city; however, though he would reluctantly bear their presence, he did not force the new comers to leave Toulouse. Actually the priests who had known them previously, came between them with their mediation:

“Monsignor Vicar, the young women who have introduced themselves to the Archbishop of Toulouse, who called them, and actually are, members of the Dominican Third Order, belong to an Institute approved by the Holy See. They are quite numerous in the Diocese of Saint-Flour and in others. In my Parish I have 40 to 50 of them. They are young women who have made their profession of piety and wear the habit of St. Dominic (it was the habit of the Tertiaries), but they do not live in community: each one leaves in one’s own home. . . Only when they are many in a Parish, they meet on Sundays to preach. Those who have introduced themselves to you are not originally from my Parish, but have been living in it since their infancy. They have been keeping an irreproachable and edifying conduct. They are pious and of a proved faithfulness. They are also hard-working, intelligent, though scarcely learned; they do not have an adequate preparation for the health care of the sick.”<sup>6</sup> .

“Monsignor Vicar, Sr. Fabre from Chaudeaisgues, whom I recommended to your consideration for a religious foundation in Toulouse, or in your Diocese, approaches once again the Archbishop for the realisation of her project, with the request to authorize the foundation which you already know about. The Archbishop would want a senior sister, possibly 40 years old, as the leader of those who have been introduced to him. . .”<sup>7</sup>

“Monsignor Vicar, the sisters have already settled in the city, following the persistent solicitations of respectable people who have prospected the great utility. . . I have been informed that the Sisters of Hope have been called by the rich. . . and that the less well-to-do people often are left without help or in non-reliable hands, being carelessly neglected and not provided with the spiritual assistance they are in need of.

Our sisters were called to fill the gap. Please, Monsignor, give them some advice. I am sure that you will find them docile. . .”<sup>8</sup>

“It is painful to realize that the presence of the Tertiary sisters in Tolouse is an occasion of division among the very people who devote themselves to works of charity. . . I have a bit of influence on some of them (it is Mother Gérine). . . I shall write to them and invite them to give up every competition. . . to keep far from the families visited by the Sisters of Hope. . . I do trust that they will act according to my recommendations; if so, I dare beg you to be benevolent

towards them, to obtain that the Archbishop may tolerate them and allow them to earn their daily bread in the city by assisting the sick of the humble class. At the moment they would suffer a great anguish if they were asked to leave your city. I don't know what they could do without any other resource. . . . It is impossible for the Sisters of Hope to meet all the needs in Toulouse. . . .”<sup>9</sup>

The recommendations had their effect; a deliberation of the Episcopal Council decided that the community of the Tertiary sisters was legitimately allowed to stay in Toulouse and to devote itself to the assistance of the sick, yet the difficulties did not come to an end so soon.

We do not know what was the reaction of Mother Géline to this matter. She does not appear to be directly responsible for the community, except for the age and the allusion in the letter of Monsignor Caubel, Vicar of Rodez. We can only suppose that she lived such trial with the peace of one who surrenders oneself to God and in him puts full trust. Anyhow it seems that after a few years everything came back to be normal. This is evident from the fact that she received, as superior, the invitation to participate in some religious celebrations held in the Cathedral. Later on the Bishop was more paternal and benevolent towards the Dominican Sisters, without, however, departing from the prudence of his predecessors.

***Gramond (1843-1844).***

This episode can be considered as an interlude in the life of Mother Géline. Providence had planned that she should accompany, during their noviciate, a group of Dominican Tertiary Teachers with whom the Parish Priest wanted to constitute a Congregation in the Diocese of Rodez, to the end of imparting Christian education to the youth and transmitting the catechesis. Mother Géline, who always made herself available, could not refuse the invitation of the canon Claubel, friend of Combal and collaborator in the said project, thus she put to their disposal her own experience of Dominican Religious Life. For more than one year, Mother Géline tried to conciliate her task as Superior of Toulouse with her presence in the Noviciate of Gramond, as it is evidenced by the epistolary correspondence.<sup>10</sup>

“...Madame, at the departure of Sr. Géline for Toulouse, I entrusted her

with a letter to be handed over to you. . . Three weeks have elapsed since she left for Toulouse and we have received no news. I beg you, Madame, to be kind enough as to tell us what you think about the project that she was requested to communicate to you. The presence of the mentioned sister is necessary in Gramond. She is expected to come without delay. If she is needed in Toulouse, she will later return “. . .”<sup>11</sup>

When her mission was over, Mother Géline returned definitely to stay with her young sisters, being solicited also by a letter:

“ . . . I hope that you will come back, my good Sister. . . Your presence is needed because you have over here a community made up by very young persons. . . ”  
You are the Superior of the House in Toulouse and, therefore, responsible to re-establish our regularity. . . ”<sup>12</sup>.

The relations with the superior-foundress of Gramond, Sr. Saint-Francois, continued to be fraternal and confidential:

“ My good Mother, seen the delay of my reply, you may rightly think of me to be indifferent before your loving letter. It is neither forgetfulness nor indifference, because I have often been thinking of this sweet duty , grateful to my heart. . . I have been at Chaudesaigues for the thermal treatment. . . and now I am much better. Another reason for postponing my reply has been my annual spiritual retreat. . . We and the Parish Priest very much regret our impossibility to attend the conference of Fr. Lacordaire. . . ”<sup>13</sup>.

“ . . . I have received your letter dated 10<sup>th</sup> only on 17<sup>th</sup>. . . I am sorry that it has been delivered so late ; just a few days ago we assigned some twenty sisters who have already left for their new destination. . . however, as a sign of my availability to fulfil your desire. . . I propose to send to him two religious for the school and one lay Sister. I thank you for your good offices and for your interest concerning our house. If you came to meet us, we would be pleased, and if we succeed in understanding each other, we can do a lot of good work for the glory of God and for our religion. . . ”<sup>14</sup>.

“ I have come to know with pleasure that you have had your community recognized and thus you have obtained the railway concession. We, too, are just going to forward a similar application, but, since I foresee that the procedure will take a long time, I kindly request you to send me four forms to get a return ticket for Lourdes. Several sisters will go along with the

pilgrimage of Rodez, travelling by night, but I worry because of my health and because of my elderly sister whom you know... If you can do me this favour, i.e. if you can send me the forms, I shall be very grateful... Being members of the same Order, and I am seeking the same facilitation, there is no injustice : for this we need not worry...<sup>15</sup>.

### ***Mother Gérine meets the Dominican Fathers for the first time***

In Toulouse, Mother Gérine had the joy of knowing, perhaps for the first time, the Dominican Friars in their black and white habit. It is probable that in their sporadic encounters, no one of them suspected that the new community did not have the required ecclesiastical approval. I presume that even Fr. Palol, a Spanish Dominican, knew nothing about it, though he despatched to Mother Gérine some imperious and polemic letters. He, in fact, reminded her of some pieces of practical advice on the regular life in clear notes, but we do not know anything about the efficacy of his words.<sup>16</sup> However they did not fall flat, and might have somehow disquieted her, if we consider other letters received more or less in the same period of time by the Prioress of the Dominican Monastery in Chalon. In it we go through complimentary expressions for the fact that the Toulouse community “seeks to be regularized and asks a copy of the Monastery Constitutions”. Perhaps Mother Gérine had confided something to her, asking her to be enlightened in the hope of modelling her Toulouse Community after that of the Monastery<sup>17</sup>.

The Toulouse Foundation coincided with the return of Fr. Lacordaire to France, where he restored the Dominican Order after the 1789 French Revolution. Having been acquainted with the establishment of a community of the Third Order Dominican Sisters, “Numerous and full of zeal”, he wrote from Bordeaux to the lady who had informed him, the Countess of Montvallat, begging her to introduce him to the Sisters, to whose prayer he entrusted the restoration of the Order<sup>18</sup>.

Moreover, he informed Sr. M. Louise Fabre, Superior of the Carcassonne community, that his commitments did not allow him to be involved in the sisters’ matters, also because they were supposed to depend on the Bishops<sup>19</sup>. Naturally, Sr. M. Louise was not competent of these matters more than her sister!

A few days before M. Gérine left for Albi, he wrote to her in Toulouse a card thanking her for what she had sent to him and declaring that he had found in her the “true spirit of their Holy Patriarch”. This testimony is very precious for us<sup>20</sup>.

The relationship between them will continue in Albi, as we shall see later.

*Two novices leave for California.*

The third encounter with the Dominicans took place in 1850: Monsignor J. Alemany and Fr. Vilarrasa, both from Spain and sailing for California, the first as Bishop of Monterey, went to France to seek some Dominican Sisters who would be ready to go with them. The Bishop actually had in mind to found a new Congregation and intended to start it with some already formed French Sisters. He addressed his request also to Mother Gérine. Such invitations as would answer her own Dominican desire for the salvation of souls, found her always available. Yet, having hardly opened three more communities, there was no sister ready for the purpose. However two novices declared themselves willing to follow the Bishop and Mother Gérine did not resist their enthusiasm. She accompanied them personally to Paris, entrusting them to a forty years old nun who also had welcomed the invitation of Monsignor Alemany. The novices were: Sr. Rose Courbattieu and Sr. Catherine Coppe.

We know of this journey of Mother Gérine to Paris through the following letter:

“My dear sister...do not doubt, there is an exchange of prayers and of hearts among us. If there is a family bond there is also the bond of the hearts, joined in the charity of our Lord. I am very happy to know that you have seen the good superior in Toulouse, Sr. Gérine, who has spent a few days with us when two postulants (sic) left for America. I consider it an honour that this good Sr. Gérine thinks of us; on our side we have not forgotten her. I beg you to extend my thanks to her for sending us the big candles. We acknowledge their receipt with thanks. Tell her that we shall light them before the altar of the Virgin and of Saint Dominic. This, I think, was the intention of our good Sisters and I feel that their donation is in tuning with their pious intention”.

In another letter dated October 10, 1851, we read:

“...the candles that good Sr. Géline has kindly sent us, have been used for the altar. Please, sister, thank her on my behalf and tell her how glad I am to hear that she knows you. We shall not forget her. Often she is a subject of our conversations and of our recreation. We entrust ourselves to her prayer and beg her to believe in our most sincere affection”<sup>21</sup>.

But the two novices of Mother Géline, who left with the Bishop for America directed to California, never reached that state, whatever Monsignor Bonhomme may say.

As soon as they landed in New York, the Bishop had them accompanied to the Community of Somerset, Dominican Congregation of the Sisters of Mary of the Springs, in the Ohio, for their formation. In reality the two young French sisters remained in the said Congregation for life<sup>22</sup>.

### ***The foundations of Tarbes, Carcassonne, Pau***

***Tarbes:*** (1848) - We do not have particular news on this house. It is known that the sisters assisted the sick in their own residence. The community, whose prioress was Sr. Maria, got separated from that of Toulouse not only because of the distance, but, and even more, it seems probable, because in the Rule they professed, that of the Third Order, there was no norm of discipline for the community life, thus the force of cohesion, among the various communities with the house of origin, was missing. According to Monsignor Bonhomme, the community of Tarbes finished by joining the Congregation of Auch, which drew its origin from the Sisters of Perpignan.

***Carcassonne (1849)*** - This house has a complex history and Monsignor Bonhomme, as he uses to do in similar cases, winds up the question with a few beats, unwilling to delay on delicate matters.

In the present work, whose interest is centred on the person of Mother Géline,

I do not feel it worthwhile to linger around facts which offer none of her traces.

Sr. Jeanine has made a diligent research on these matters and has collected all of them in her work; I refer to it for further information.

Here is, however, a brief synthesis of events. After the agreements to the new foundation among the Bishop of Carcassonne, Monsignor Bonhomme and the Abbot Piéchaud, Parish of Saint-Etienne in Toulouse<sup>23</sup>, this sent there Sr. M. Louise with another sister for the assistance to the sick. Mother Gérine managed this foundation without any formality but her sister on reaching Carcassonne wrote to her<sup>24</sup> saying that the Bishop expected a formal request. Mother Gérine, then, on 28<sup>th</sup> November, 1848, wrote the following letter:

“Monsignor,

With reference to the letter with which you have honoured me, I wish to say that I had in mind to accompany personally to Carcassonne the Sisters whom you had requested, but *contretemps* have obliged me to go to the countryside to see a sister who was seriously ill. Her health condition was such as it was not possible for me to take her away, thus I was compelled to wait and to let the two sisters, Louise Fabre and Agnes Brunet, leave unaccompanied. I should have sent you a letter and now apologize for not doing it.

I wish to tell you, Monsignor, that the two sisters enjoy my full trust and that they will correspond with zeal and humility to the goodness of Monsignor, who will surely not fail to extend his protection on the establishment of our Order in his diocese.

Most humble and obedient servant of your Excellence,

Sr. Gérine Fabre, Superior of the Dominican Sisters in Toulouse.

Sr. Jeanine, among other things, quotes the following from the Chronicles of the Carcassonne Community:

“The resources from the health care of the sick were almost nothing and we had sometimes to turn for help to the house of Toulouse or to the generosity of Monsignor Bonnechose who has always been a real father to us. We have

been living in perfect harmony and mutual understanding with His Eminence during his too short stay at Carcassonne.

Monsignor often honoured us with his fatherly visits and knew our situation to perfection, but in spite of the scantiness of our resources , he has never wanted us to withdraw, though several times we have manifested to him this intention of ours. Seeing that the care for the sick was not sufficient to guarantee our livelihood, His Eminence authorized us verbally to go ahead with all the works of our Institute, out of which teaching was the main one”<sup>25</sup>.

Actually the nursing activity which was favoured by the Archbishop did not satisfy any longer Sr. M. Louise because the sick were poor and too few. She, then, started the teaching one year after her arrival at Carcassonne, with an enterprising courage similar to that of her sister, who, however, was audacious, but humble, and used her talents moved exclusively by faith and charity.

The school, managed by Sr. M. Louise, developed to the point of including a hostel for young girls and a training college for teachers. She acquired large premises adapting them to her purposes. Everything seemed to proceed well, also because the citizens who appreciated education contributed with abundant economic liberality.

Did such a rapid development generate doubts in the mind of the Ecclesiastical Authorities and the jealousy of some similar institution? The fact is that the attitude of Bishop La Bouillerie , who like his predecessor had at first encouraged the consolidation of the school, all of a sudden changed his attitude and became intransigent.

The Bishop presumed to know the budget, but had a clash with the superior who did not intend to give any account to him. The difficult relations finished by breaking and the news came to be published. Between accusations and defences, a controversy arose that conditioned the public opinion and caused unpleasant events.

The Master General of the Order, Fr. V. Jandel, and the Congregation VV and RR had to intervene with their sanctions. They came to the conclusion that the Tertiary Sisters could continue to manage and direct the school only as simple lay personnel. But from then on the community kept decreasing in

number and the school lost its prestige with decreasing students on roll. When Sr. Louise died, only a few months after the death of Mother Gérine, the hostel was handed over to other personnel and the only Tertiary Sisters who remained, Sr. Augustina Delrieu and Sr. Angelica Soulet, left Carcassonne the following year to settle in Agen. Here on 1890, having acquired a tomb in the cemetery, they transferred the remains of Mother Gérine and Sr. M. Louise who had been buried in the cemetery of Carcassonne.

*Pau: (1848)* - Towards the end of the year, Mother Gérine sent a group of Sisters to Pau for the assistance of the sick: Sr. Maria was the prioress of the group, but she very soon broke the relations with Toulouse and the community continued to live in extreme poverty, keeping the habit of the Tertiaries, while in the other houses the sisters had already changed it with the white and black one. Just a few of them were left, when Mother Gérine took with her to Pau two young sisters and all of them joined once again the new comers.

Later, at Pau, more communities will be erected and the sisters will exercise in it a vast apostolate.

We have only a few pieces of news about the community in Toulouse, which was the cradle of the Congregation, but events in it must not have been too easy.

We should continue the researches. . . .

After the definitive departure of Mother Gérine for Albi at the end of October 1852, her sister, Sr. Dominique, was made superior and her junior sister, Sr. Vincent Fabre, Novice Mistress<sup>2 6</sup>. The first died on 3<sup>rd</sup>. July 1891 and the second on 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 1898. Both of them were buried in the cemetery of Agen, near the other two sisters.

#### *A digression about some immovable property*

I think it is opportune at this stage to make a digression concerning the immovable property of the Albi Congregation. On 10<sup>th</sup> May, 1872, the Congregation received the juridical status also on behalf of the French State and, consequently, the houses of the Congregation that were entitled to some sisters as individual persons, became legally the property of the Congregation

which had acquired the right to possess. The houses of Toulouse and Carcassonne instead, we don't know why, remained entitled respectively to Sr. Dominique and Sr. Louise Fabre who were the prioresses. When they died, by a legal will, Sr. Vincent Fabre became the heir. When this also died, 1898, the will declared as universal heir the Tertiaries Sr. Augustina Delrieu and Sr. Angelica Soulet, but the junior brother of the two dead sisters, Pierre Fabre, contested the Will of Sr. M. Louise and Sr. Vincent with motivations that the Toulouse Tribunal considered to be valid and declared that only Pierre Fabre could claim the inheritance. This sentence came out on 10<sup>th</sup> May, 1901.

The following is one of the motivations exposed by the Toulouse Tribunal :

“Seen that in the subsidiary conclusions the young ladies Delrieu and Soulet...asked to prove :

- 1 that Pierre Fabre has repeatedly affirmed that they were not true religious bound by vows:
- 2 that he has declared to pursue the process only with the intention of disposing the goods in favour of the true religious;
- 3 that he has often made clear of having already disposed, by will, of the goods in favour of a community whose mother house is in Italy...

Seen that the facts were not pertinent...the Tribunal...pronounced the invalidity (nullity) of the Will dated 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1891 (the one of Sr. Vincent) 16<sup>th</sup> July and 6<sup>th</sup> November, 1888 (those of Sr. Louise). Consequently Pierre Fabre, natural heir of Louise, of, etc... had the right to claim entirely the goods left by them in inheritance.....”<sup>27</sup>.

The controversy of Pierre Fabre throws light not only on the end of the immovable properties that belonged to the Fabre Sisters, but also on some documents concerning Mother Gérine, as we shall mention later.

But, before closing this phase of Mother Gérine's life, I wish to express some reflections of mine.

From the very start Mother Gérine had at heart the formation of her young daughters. To this end she sought the assistance of the Abbot Piéchaud of Saint Etienne, who collaborated with her for the spiritual progress of the Toulouse young community. He always manifested not only his esteem for the Foundress, but also a great benevolence through his pastoral care, so that Religious Life

might be lived with faithfulness<sup>28</sup>.

How did Mother Géline, who so very tenderly and maternally loved her “Pètites”, experience the separation of some communities not only at this phase, but also later? Particularly what did she feel in her heart when she came to know, things having already happened, that the two novices, generously offered to Bishop Alemany for a foundation in California, had instead been sent to another Congregation to complete their formation?<sup>29</sup> How did she receive the Sister from California when Fr. V. Jandel, the then Vicar General of the Dominican Friars, addressed the sister to her, only two years later?<sup>30</sup> With regard to these two novices, it doesn't seem that some more news ever arrived, because nothing is found in the archives of Albi, in this regard<sup>31</sup>.

By an initiative of Mother Pia Quochi, in 1992, after making opportune researches, we found precise information on their life and their death<sup>32</sup>.

**HISTORY**  
THE CONGREGATION OF THE DOMINICAN SISTERS  
OF ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA

*Albi: (1852)*

After epistolary solicitations on behalf of the Albi Mayor<sup>33</sup>, who assured Mother Gérine that all, from the Archbishop to the public opinion<sup>34</sup>, were waiting for the nursing sisters and that everything to welcome them was ready. Mother Gérine herself, leaving Toulouse by the end of August 1852, arrived with two other sisters in this city to open a house that would become the Mother House of the Congregation. On the subsequent 2<sup>nd</sup> September, she made her first visit to the Archbishop, Monsignor Eugenio De Jerphanion, to pay him homage and to ask his blessing on the new foundation. The Archbishop welcomed her paternally.

This welcome, according to Monsignor Bonhomme, meant the approval of the Congregation. “On 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1852”, he affirms, “the new Congregation was canonically erected in the Diocese”.

This news is quite unlikely with the meaning it has passed to history. The above-mentioned was just a welcome to the city of Albi. How is it possible that the Bishop, on two feet, could approve canonically a Congregation whose Foundress he had come to know for the first time?

This reflection of mine has later been confirmed and the news has been found truly groundless. It is the Archbishop himself who clarifies it. In fact, writing to the Bishop of Perpignan after ten years, he affirmed:

“When Mother Gérine was introduced to me by the Mayor of Albi, who went to Toulouse to meet her, I questioned her on her Institute, on her

Constitutions, etc. With regard to this last point I did not find her too explicit. However, since the work had already developed elsewhere, I accepted her, as she was, into my Diocese, proposing to regularize whatever in the organisation was left to be desired. God has blessed the abnegation and the zeal of these good daughters. Their number is increasing and they have founded several convents, depending on the one in Albi. . . . I think that the time has come to regularize the relation of all the foundations with the Mother House. . . .”<sup>35</sup>.

In these words of the Archbishop we find the appreciation he nourished for the work of Mother Gérine and, indirectly for the Foundress herself. Moreover, we find his desire to regularize the Institution that had already been established elsewhere, that is in Toulouse where she had come from.

Monsignor De Jerphanion died in 1864 without having realized his proposal; it was his successor, Monsignor Lyonnet, to do it during the years 1865-1872, as we shall see.

I will not linger on the particulars of the foundations in this historical phase of M. Gérine and of the Congregation. They were not few and Monsignor Bonhomme speaks of them in his book. My intention is to present some reflections on the historical journey characterized by lights and shadows, through which it emerges the constant docility of our Mother to the inspiration of the Spirit, her faithfulness to the ideal of St. Dominic, her trust in God’s Providence in whatever circumstance and through the persons she met in her life and mission.

Like all other foundations, that of Albi was characterized by poverty. In fact the life of the Dominican Tertiary Sisters in this city was inaugurated in a joyful life of poverty. The Rule of the Third Order they professed and faithfully observed, scanned the spiritual life in different expressions: Office of Mary, various devotions, exercise of virtue, practice of vows. The concrete life and the work of the sisters were in line with the wise regulations that Mother Gérine gave to all the communities, according to the personal situations of the sisters devoted to the assistance of the sick, to the teaching of the children, the youth and the girls in the sewing school.

Two years after the arrival in Albi, 1854, she succeeded in purchasing the first house of the Congregation on the land where the Dominican Convent was erected and later destroyed by the fury of the French Revolution. That property, confiscated by the State, had been alienated and had become the property of some private people. One of them had just put his possessions on sale and M. Gérine did not allow the occasion to escape; she had, however, to overcome many financial difficulties, with patience and humble audacity.

The house, that was restored, restructured and extended, is the one where now her remains rest and it is the Mother House of the Congregation of St. Catherine of Siena.

At the same time, Fr. Lacordaire, who had founded the Fathers' Convent at Toulouse, and Fr. Sandreau, his collaborator, did not lose sight of the work of Mother Gérine and solicited the community to take the white and black habit of St. Dominic as the communities of Toulouse and Carcassonne had already done. They had started wearing it two years before, in 1854. From that moment Monsignor Bonhomme started to call them : the white sisters.

### ***Its development in France: Perpignan (1858)***

M. Gérine opened a house for nursing Sisters in Perpignan, requested by De Bonet on behalf of the Ordinary of the place, Monsignor Gerbet, who straightaway started to like with paternal heart the community governed by Sr. Celeste.

A few years later the relationship between these sisters and M. Gérine became difficult. Fr. Bonhomme speaks of a breakage, attributing the responsibility to Sr. Celeste.

The manuscript we have found in the archive of the Congregation, written by a person in Auch, in relating the episode, throws the responsibility on Mother Gérine. This posthumous relation<sup>36</sup>, does not seem to be very objective and contains other inaccuracies.

Some light on the reality of facts can be drawn from the already quoted letter of Monsignor Jerphanion and Monsignor Gerbet<sup>37</sup> where we can perhaps detect the basic problem.

Without any written Constitutions to regulate the interpersonal relations and the competence of the authority, it was impossible, as already said, for Mother Gérine to exercise well her authority and to be a point of reference for all the communities, consequently it was unavoidable that questions on responsibilities would arise.

In 1862, the sisters of Perpignan actually were divided among themselves: part of them went back to Albi, others remained with the prioress Sr. Celeste under the authority of Bishop Gerbet who thought of drafting a text of Constitutions, but died before bringing it to completion. He was succeeded by Monsignor Ramadié who did not have a good opinion of the sisters and with whom remarkable difficulties arose, being he an adherent to the Gallican current of the Church in France. The superior, Sr. Celeste, appealed to the then Master General Fr. Jandel, who reassured her with the following note dated 21<sup>st</sup> May 1871:

“The situation of the Tertiary Sisters at Carcassonne is as abnormal as yours is regular. . . . You are the daughters of St. Dominic and your house, canonically erected by Monsignor Gerbet, has always been recognized and encouraged by us. . . .”<sup>38</sup>.

The Bishop also approached the Master with two letters<sup>39</sup>. Fr. Jandel replied that, having he informed the Holy See, this would surely take action to remedy the situation<sup>40</sup>”. No document from the Holy See is in hand as yet, but it is interesting what Fr. Bianchi writes as Procurator General of the Order and consultant of the Congregation of VV. & RR.

“ . . . I knew that Monsignor Ramadié opposes every Order or Religious Institution, particularly that of St. Dominic. . . . The Capuchins also know it. In fact they had to leave Perpignan because of him. We, too, had there a monastery of nursing sisters of the Third Order. Many times he tried to influence them to change their name into Sisters of St. Paul, St. Anthony or any other saint, except that of St. Dominic. He appointed two superiors in the same house, forbade them to give the habit and to take professions, tried every way, even not praiseworthy, so that they might give up the religious spirit of the Dominican Tertiary Sisters.

On my side, I have tried my utmost to defend those poor sisters who were of admiration and example to the whole city. Everything was reported to the Sacred Congregation when the late Most Eminent Cardinal Vitelleschi was Secretary. The case was entrusted to the Holy Office. One day Monsignor Vitelleschi told me that if the sisters did not want to see themselves destroyed, they were advised to leave secretly for some other diocese.

I told everything to the sisters who, with the regret of the whole city, left for Auch where they were welcomed by the very good Archbishop who, when he came to Rome, thanked me for the precious gift I had offered him by sending to him those sisters whom he highly appreciated. In the short span of a few years they have erected already four houses and are of immense benefit to the people<sup>41</sup>.

Within a few years the health service of Mother Gérine's daughters extended to every category of people in various cities and villages. Audaciously available and tirelessly dynamic, Mother Gérine coped with the requests of new realisable foundations, as she had done in Toulouse, ready to answer the appeals whatever place they came from. She opened new houses without any other economic and cultural resources, but the wealth of her heart. . . . Her daughters, urged by her example, did everything with faith and generosity, living their poverty joyfully and accepting anything their service was remunerated with. This attitude allowed them to devote themselves gratuitously to the poor. They made no distinction between rich and poor because they were fully aware of nursing in everybody the suffering members of Christ. Since 1854 teaching was added to their medical assistance. In fact, Mother Gérine had already opened a little school at Lisle d' Albi to answer the needs of the families. Later on, however, the majority of her schools became more regular also because she became more and more aware of the importance for the sisters to be fully qualified as good teachers. She, therefore, sent her sisters to the training college of Carcassonne and Paris, where Madame Pape managed a Vanguard college of education. In France she did her utmost to found her communities, selecting localities where either Dominic himself or his followers had been living before the Revolution came to efface their presence. By the spring of 1877, the houses numbered 17.

## OPENING OF HOUSES IN ITALY: CIVITANOVA (1862)

Providence, meanwhile, was planning to open the way to Italy for her first foundation beyond the frontiers. Her broadmindedness did not consider the boundaries of her country a limit to her field of action. On the contrary, with her simplicity and with the missionary spirit of an authentic disciple of Saint Dominic, she accepted the invitation of the imperial family of France that possessed vast estates in Ancona, Marche. Mr. Mocquard, notary of his Imperial Majesty Napoleon III, glad to offer Mother Gérine a work that embraced the double activity of the Congregation, in Civitanova Marche, Fermo diocese, wrote the following to her:

“...I have come to know the merits of the sisters of your Order. I know the self-denial and devotion with which they devote themselves to the needs of the infants and the aged. I do not doubt, therefore that, helped by you, I can realize the intention of His Majesty to open in the imperial palace... a nursery for all the underprivileged children... and a hall for the aged, the weak, the needy who could spend in it their daily time in winter...”<sup>42</sup>.

Preparations for the realisation of this project were going on in Civitanova. The Chamberlain of the Emperor, E. Hallaire, wrote to the Mayor and the Municipal Council, inviting them to participate

“...in a Holy Mass ending with the “Te Deum” to celebrate the feast of the Emperor on 15<sup>th</sup> June 1862, in the Parish Church... The presence of the members of the Municipal Council will be a testimony of sympathy for the august person whom I represent, and also *for the philanthropic works which will soon be founded in his name to the benefit of the people*”<sup>43</sup>.

Mother Gérine accepted with humility and docility towards Divine Providence and co-operated by sending to Paris Sr. Augustina Pratviel, who had been assigned as responsible for the foundation in Italy. From Paris this sister, in agreement with Madame Pape and Mocquard, on 30<sup>th</sup> November 1862, communicated to Mother Gérine the following information:

“Civita Nova is situated on the shore of the Adriatic sea at five leagues from Ancona. It is governed by the king of Sardegnia. Winters are short but rigid. Civita Nova is the name of the palace we are going to live in and is situated in

the boundary of the Emperor's property. From what Mr. Mocquard says, however, it is a cold palace, if we want to baptize it with this name, solid... This is all... In other words, it is not the city we expected. We still have to know the name where Civita Nova is located. But how can we know the name of the Bishop or Archbishop if nobody tells us?"

The first 3 sisters left Albi for Civitanova on Christmas of the same year, 1862. Mother G rine went for a visit in 1863 together with Count E. Gard s who, on that occasion accompanied her to Rome to meet the Holy Father Pope Pius IX. In that Audience our Foundress experienced a great joy. On receiving the skull-cap made by Mother G rine, the Holy Father gave to her his own with the words, "My daughter, take the skull-cap I am wearing and put yours in its place". He then added, "Go, my daughter, and extend your Institute as much as you can". These words echoed in and touched her heart as an answer to the apostolic desire that burned in her. It was an omen that she would see in future the realisation of her dream to obtain the approval of the Congregation. This noble project, however, will remain unrealized.

The foundation of the houses in Italy multiplied themselves to reach the number of 13 in 1877<sup>44</sup>. M. G rine in her seven journeys to Italy, according to the documents we have in hands, founded personally only two houses, that of Bologna (1867) and that of Genova (1869). This is what we read in the register of "Clothes" and "Professions", kept in Bologna and Genova, "Having Divine Providence pleased himself to bless the works of mercy to which we devote ourselves for the good of our neighbours, concerning both the care of the sick and the education of the youth, it is time now to select the subjects that can continue to spread these works. The Bishops suggest that, to avoid the expenses of the journeys, the young recruits may have their formation in Italy". In the mentioned register we find some signatures of M. G rine in the certificates of Clothing and Professions in 1869, 1873, 1876. The following are the dates and the circumstances of her journeys to Italy, as far as we know:

1863 – Visit to the house of Civitanova where she met the emperor Napoleon III and then travelled to Rome for an audience with the Pope.

1867 – Visit to the house of Ascoli Piceno and then, with a letter of

recommendation from the Archbishop of this city, she opened the house of Bologna.

1869 - Visit to the house of Bologna and, with a letter of recommendation from the Dominican Fathers, she introduced herself to the Dominicans in Genova. The Bishop of the city blessed the Foundress and her houses.

1872 - Monsignor Bonhomme (page 186) attests that M. Gérine is in Italy.

1873 - Her visit is made evident by her signatures in the above-mentioned register.

1874 - Again Monsignor Bonhomme (p. 294) writes that M. Gérine approached the Bishop of Genova to implore his blessing on her new foundation in Montevideo.

1876 - This visit is attested by a signature in the register of Professions in Genova, but also in a register of Peccioli and in a letter from Sr. Augustina Pratviel<sup>45</sup>.

All these visits to the communities, that cost financial sacrifices for the journeys, speak to us of the maternal solicitude and tenderness of M. Gérine for the sisters in far away houses. The evidence of such feelings is given by a letter to the Archbishop of Ascoli in favour of the French Sisters from whom people kept at a distance because of a certain diffidence. Her intervention provoked an extraordinary interest of the Archbishop that changed the situation immediately. We know the appreciation and admiration that, after such intervention, the French sisters enjoyed because of the kindness that accompanied their service : caring for the youth with French lessons, embroidery, music and assistance to the sick.

### ***The first CONSTITUTIONS (1865 e 1872)***

M. Gérine had never neglected the young recruits who reached her mostly from the mountain of Avernia. The only text she was inspired by from the very beginning of her work was the Rule of the Third Order. She did not have any other text of norms. Fr. Bonhomme himself considered this book to be full of Dominican Spirituality and M. Gérine never failed to give her sisters good criteria of religious behaviour. But now that the Congregation extended

beyond the Alps from France to Italy, the Bishop of Albi, Monsignor Lyonnet, was urged to realize the project of his predecessor; he wanted to regularize the asset of the family of M. Gérine by entrusting with a drawing up of a text of Constitutions Rev. Fr. N. Sandreau in the convent of Toulouse. He succeeded Rev. Fr. Lacordaire who died in 1861 as provincial of France. It was not difficult for Fr. Sandreau to set on this work since he knew the Congregation and esteemed its Foundress as “a woman of sacrifice, a woman of God”. He was happy to fulfil the task of consolidating, through a written legislation, the community life and the regime of the Congregation, by strengthening the framework of the various communities with uniform and common norms. He compiled a kind of collection of texts which included the Rule of St. Augustine, the Rule of the Third Order of Penance of St. Dominic and the Constitutions of the Congregation of St. Catherine of Siena. The text, signed and approved by the Archbishop Lyonnet in 1865, remained as a manuscript.

The first diocesan approval of the Congregation of Albi, therefore, goes back to this date, though we have no official document to certify it. In fact, on 18<sup>th</sup> September 1865, Fr. Sandreau, O.P., with a mandate from the Archbishop, declared that “The Foundress, V.Rev. M. Gérine Fabre, was nominated and instituted for life as Superior General of the Congregation”<sup>46</sup>. The following day, 19<sup>th</sup> September, he received the renewal of the Profession of M. Gérine for five years.

The Archbishop, however, in 1872 wanted the text to be printed, though much shorter.

The provided text has the title: Constitutions of the Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena. At the back of its first page we find the approval of Monsignor Lyonnet in date 29<sup>th</sup> September 1872, which declares the text to be “very useful for the direction and the sanctification of the Communities of the Congregation”. In another page, after the statement that the sisters had been called by Monsignor De Jerphanion from Albi, we read:

“A further Ordinance of Monsignor Lyonnet has erected canonically the Congregation in 1872... he is its first Superior, both for its ordinary jurisdiction and its foundation.. The present Constitutions receive their solid authority from the categorical approval of His Excellency”<sup>47</sup>.

On 29<sup>th</sup> September 1872, there was for the first time a beautiful celebration in which the Foundress with the majority of the elderly sisters pronounced the formula of the Perpetual Profession<sup>48</sup>. This year assumed a great importance in the history of the Congregation, though its approval actually had taken place in 1865. Moreover, in 1872 Mother Gérine obtained the juridical recognition also on behalf of the French State, as we have already remembered.

At this point another question arises in my mind: What was the part of the Foundress in the drafting of the Constitutions? It doesn't seem that there has been any collaboration of hers, yet they are supposed to be a faithful mirror of her spirituality, of her life project, of the healthy customs followed by the Family project of her own heart and mind which had started in Toulouse!

#### THE ERECTION OF HOUSES IN SOUTH AMERICA (1874)

During her visit to Genova, solicited, as already said, by her missionary spirit, Mother Gérine soon realized the foundation of Montevideo. Fr. Lephitz, a French missionary in Uruguay, approached for missionary purposes Sr. Catherine Attanè in her previous journey to Montevideo and, having discovered in her a great heart, ready to collaborate for the good of the people, he had forwarded an appeal to Albi for the opening of a house of nursing sisters. We know that the Bishop was not favourable to give his authorisation due to the low economic possibility of the Congregation and also due to the distance. Mother Gérine was not such a woman as would easily give on before similar difficulties, for which she decided to seek the permission from the Bishop of Genova, who was favourable and encouraging. Before her going back to France, the first group of Missionary Sisters was already sailing for Montevideo, being taken care of by the Religious of Bétharram, to whom Fr. Lephitz belonged. The second group left from Bordeaux by the end of that same year. Later on the same Archbishop of Albi authorized the local Noviciate in Montevideo. With the third group that left from France, Mother Gérine sent as a visitor Sr. Augustina Pratviel, whose sister, Sr. Jacinta, had left as a missionary with the second group.

From the very start the foundations in Latin America had a remarkable development, especially in the field of education.

*The PROJECT of Mother Gérine in 1877*

The year 1877 is particularly relevant in the life and work of Mother Gérine. I love to define it as “the year of her frustrating disappointed great dream”.

I open this argument with two letters, two documents of a design that throws light on her realistic good sense, inspired by love and worries to secure the existence and consolidation of the Congregation, which had been born in her, “less than nothing”, but entrusted to the Providence of God.

One letter was sent to the prioress of Ascoli Piceno, Sr. Santa Croce Gayda, the other was addressed to the Cardinal Archbishop of Fermo, Monsignor. A. Malagola. Both letters reveal how God had favoured her with the courage of an authentic faith-trust - God will provide - from which grew the hope to overcome her hidden conflict with the new Archbishop of Albi, Monsignor Ramadié.

J.M.J.D.C.

Dearest Sr. Santa Croce,

I am this moment at Pau and feel very fine along with the other sisters. Providence, who never ceases to watch on those who trust in Him, has inspired a Rev. Dominican Father, who is very close to the Master General, to bring to completion the great work of the approval of our Congregation on behalf of the Sacred Congregation of the Bishops and Regulars. I tell you this for your consolation since the venerable father does not want to be mentioned and recommends us to keep the secret on all the steps we shall make to this regard. Therefore, please, keep all this as confidential and hand over to Monsignor the enclosed letter to solicit his testimonials and recommendations which are indispensable. We shall equally write to all the Bishops and shall go to Rome as soon as we receive their letters. I have requested Monsignor in Ascoli to give his letter to you so that you may relay it to me. Pray that the Lord may please himself to bless and secure success to our efforts. Best wishes to mother and all the other sisters.

Go ahead, courage, with God’s help everything will be achieved. The sisters

join me in sending you our most affectionate greetings. Embracing you in the Lord and St. Dominic.

Please, address your reply to Albi where I shall return next week.

Sr. Géline.

Pau, 30<sup>th</sup> March 1877<sup>49</sup>

Monsignor,

The benevolence Your Excellency has manifested and continues to manifest to the sisters of the two houses in your diocese encourages me to submit to you a big project for the future of our Congregation. We feel that the time is ripe enough to have our Congregation approved by the Holy See.

The first House was founded in Toulouse in 1840 and it has pleased Divine Providence to make it fruitful . Now we have 33 communities: 17 in France, 13 in Italy and 3 in America. The Constitutions we have added, with the approval of the Albi Bishop, to the Rule of the Third Order of St.Dominic, have already a certain consistency, but there is still the need of the approval conferred by the supreme authority of the Apostolic See. After all, I am now advanced in age and I would die happier if I could see the beginning of this great achievement that would assure our existence in the Church. This is why I come to beg Your Eminence to grant us the testimonials and recommendation letters required by the Congregation of VV & RR.

I am forwarding the same application to all the Bishops in whose dioceses our houses are situated, but I expect above all your recommendations since I know how much Your Eminence is loved by the Supreme Pontiff and how much he will take your testimony into consideration for the happy conclusion of our cause.

If you intend to comply with our request, kindly remit your letter to the Prioress of Civitanova who will send it to me.

While kissing your hand and asking your blessing for my sisters and myself, I pray St.Dominic to convey to you the expression of our deep gratitude.

With the sense of a profound veneration,

Sr. Géline Fabre.<sup>50</sup>

Pau 27<sup>th</sup> March, 1877.

Here it is, torn open, the veil that had kept the passion of Mother Gérine hidden and that exploded as she perceived the weight of her uneasy and long existence; the passion that urged her, before dying, to start the procedure of the approval that would secure for her daughters, “an existence in the Church.” She had spent her own life to give birth to her religious family and to bring it up. In obedience to His holiness Pius IX, she had extended it as much as possible, trusting Providence and knowing to be “less than nothing”. Misunderstandings, tensions, crises had not been missing, but they had been overcome with faith. Now, without any intention to break her relations with the local Church, she wanted to put her Congregation under the umbrella of the Bishop of Rome.

Why did Mother Gérine recommend Sr. Santa Croce “to keep secret all the steps they would take” ? After all the Pontifical approval is a normal step for a diocesan Congregation. Well, she feared that somebody would put an obstacle against her project. Yet she was writing to all the Bishops a letter similar to the one she had sent to the Archbishop of Fermo. She might have been doubting to miss the favour of the Bishop of Albi. What did Ramadié think of Mother Gérine ? Was he prejudiced because of what had happened in Perpignan and Carcassonne? Monsignor Bonhomme affirms that, when he was in Perpignan, Monsignor Ramadié was benevolent with the sisters of Amelie, but once made Bishop of Albi, he tried to investigate among the sisters and see whether the Albi Convent continued its relations with the Dominican Sisters of Carcassonne. Now, being the Bishop of Albi, he was also the major superior of the Congregation, therefore in a better position to favour the approval from Rome. How did he consider the fact that Mother Gérine was the Superior General for life?

Among the letters of the Bishops in reply to the request of Mother Gérine, whose copies are with us, only the letters of Monsignor Ramadié and some other French Bishops are missing. There are two letters from France, one from the Bishop of Mende and the other from the Bishop of Boyonne, others from the Bishops of Italy and Latin America, and all of them, without exception, are favourable to the project of the Foundress. Mother Gérine did not go to Rome, but kept in her heart the bitterness of her disappointment.

Fr. R. Bianchi, in the mentioned relation writes:

“When I came to know that Monsignor Ramadié from Perpignan was promoted to Albi, I instinctively thought that the Albi Congregation would soon finish. . . . He started his destruction by inducing to her resignation the Superior General and by making another one according to his liking, after listening to only a few sisters, without caring for the others, as I came to know two years ago, when I travelled to France.”

But before this categorical affirmation that leaves no doubt about the resignation of Mother Gérine (which followed after some years), in the same document we find another one which is not less meaningful :

“The Congregation of Albi has never been approved by the Holy See and never affiliated to the Order”.

From this statement I deduce that it was he the Dominican Father very close to the Master General mentioned in the letter of Sr. Santa Croce; in fact he was already the procurator General of the Order and a consultant of the VV.&RR., thus he knew facts very well.

It is time now to say something about the testimonial letters from the Bishops to Mother Gérine and collected by her to take them to Rome for the approval from the Holy See, but which she never did.

The letters, 13 in number, are in the archives of Albi, but they constitute a rebus for us. They hide a big mystery that has somehow been cleared. Eight of them were written by the Bishops from Italy, three from Latin America and two from France. Out of them, twelve were written by hand in the inventory by the Notary Beauquet of Angen, dated 20<sup>th</sup> March, 1899. Only the letter of Bishop Boyonné is original. How to explain this fact? I may formulate the following hypotheses:

There is no letter from the Bishops of France, including from Monsignor Ramadié, because they did not comply with the request of Mother Gérine, and this is the very reason why the case could not be considered, according to the words of Fr. Bianchi.

Most probably, after her resignation, Mother Gérine took those letters with her to Carcassonne as a bitter remembrance, except, because of overlooking, the letter of bishop Boyonné. After her death they remained

with the Tertiaries Sr. Augustina Delrieu and Sr. Angelica Soulet, along with other relics of the departed, which they kept with care.

Through the researches of Sr. Jeanine, we have come to know that, after the death of Sr. Vincent Fabre (1898), her brother Pierre contested the testament of his sisters and provoked the compilation of the inventory of whatever was found in the house of the two Tertiary Sisters in Agen.

Among the writings that the notary Beuquet put in the inventory, we have found also the following two letters which, however, were not part of the things that belonged to the two sisters who made the will. The sisters in Agen later on joined the mother house in Albi and took with them all the souvenirs, including the letters, sealed by the notary who had made the inventory. They are kept always with veneration. These two sisters would never imagine the historical value of those letters. They are very precious to us since they witness to the project of our Foundress. The remembrance of that project must have often come to the mind of our mother during her exile in Carcassonne. They must have re-kindled in her memory many hopes, and must have been the occasion for many acts of surrender, often renewed.

### ***Resignation of Mother Gérine (1879)***

What do we say about the resignation of Mother Gérine? I think that Monsignor Ramadié had been maturing the decision of asking her to resign for various motives, among which the election of Mother Gérine as superior for life. His attempts to take away from her the jurisdiction of her congregation must have nourished his will to realize his intention. Shelled up in the interest of the local church, he was not a person ready to suffer with impunity to be informed of the project only the last moment... If Mother Gérine had informed him earlier, what would have happened? Mother Gérine must have suffered a lot for this humiliating failure and even more for the way the bishop acted. It was a moment in which she was experiencing a strong physical weakness and the uneasiness of her old age. Her exceptional energy was slowly disappearing, as unequivocally Monsignor Bonhomme states (page 192) adding that "God asked of her the last sacrifice for the good and prosperity of her work; she finished by asking Monsignor Ramadié to be relieved from her charge". Did things really happen this way? I am convinced of the contrary.

Mother Gérine accepted the sacrifice, but God alone knows at what cost, since she suffered with humility and docility. The resignation was imposed on her, as Fr. Bianchi firmly states and Monsignor Bonhomme himself jotted it down (page 305), “the prioress in America could write on 8<sup>th</sup> May 1879, to Mother Gérine only a few months before she was deposed from her office”. Here is the truth.

We know how this sad event came to happen; on 3<sup>rd</sup> September, the superiors in France having gathered for the spiritual exercises, Mother Gérine gave her resignation on 7<sup>th</sup> by signing a declaration that had already been prepared. At the end of the exercises, only four days after, in the presence of MOTHER GÉRINE, Alberta Lavergne was elected as the new superior general. The election was soon ratified by the archbishop.

Her election was effectively illegal, since no regular chapter had been convoked, according to the constitutions, and it was imposed by the major superior. In fact not all the sisters who had the right of voting participated in the chapter.

Following the indirect invitation to leave Albi and having the right to choose her new community, Mother Gérine left for the community of Chaudesaigues, where she stayed for a short time edifying everybody with her piety, modesty, humility and a deep spirit of self-denial. After a few months she felt nostalgia for Albi, but very soon she realized that her presence, though discreet, would somehow disturb the new government. She, therefore took the heroic decision of leaving Albi definitely for Carcassonne, the separated community, where she could share with her own Sister, Sr. M. Louise, the last years of her life. They had been together in Toulouse at the beginning of their religious life, together they would spend the last painful years of their life, assisted with caring love by the two left tertiary Sisters: Sr. Augustina Delrieu, vice-directress of the hostel, and Sr. Angelica Soulet, a clever nurse.

### ***Carcassonne: death of Mother Gérine (1887)***

I can imagine M.G setting on her journey, this time all alone, sorrowful, but free. The choice of Carcassonne allowed her to share the pains with her beloved sister, without disturbing anyone. Living far from each other for a long time must have been a martyrdom for both of them. Now they would pray together, weep together, support each other. We can perceive the intensity

of their communion by being in tune with their soul, respectful of their silence, permeated by mystery, but very eloquent... Here Mother Géline lived a silent and hidden life for full seven years, in the unconditional surrendering of herself to God. It was not an escape, even less a sterile solitude. She accepted the immolation and abandoned herself to God like Jesus on the cross. She transformed her existence into a fertile seed for the whole family. In fact the shoot in Italy became more and more consistent during those years. God was munificent towards her who immolated herself with love. The power of God made the weakness of “the less than nothing” to become fertile in Him. Perhaps Mother Géline reflected often on the past; the words of her Bishop must have been burning in her... We know nothing about these long years of sorrow, but undoubtedly she must have been thinking about her daughters in France and in Italy. Her faith was nourished by contemplating the fecundity of the cross. The Risen Lord enlightened her exile and re-invigorated her hope, while her existence was consumed by living the beatitudes in their fullness. All this made her renunciation to bear fruit.

With a brief handwritten memo, the novice Sr. Sabloyrolles, niece of Sr. Angelica Soulet, relates to us that, while in Agen her aunt, flooded with rivers of tears, was putting in order the papers of Mother Géline, she regretfully and lovingly spoke to her of the late Foundress, weaving all her virtues and speaking of her heroic sacrifice.

From the historical point of view, we have with us only the participation of her death to the sisters in Italy:

*Dearest sisters,*

We are sending this letter to you and to all the branch houses of Albi with the invitation of raising fervent prayers to God for the eternal repose of our dear Mother Géline. who slept in the Lord on the last day of the past year. She passed away after a two months disease during which she has been, as she was throughout her life, a true model of edification. Especially in her last days, she was incessantly with a smile on her lips, and when she was told that soon she would be better or that her illness was not serious, she answered with a smile that she did not wish to recover. She rather requested death not to delay.

She died without agony half an hour after receiving the last sacraments

and the plenary indulgence. She kept a smile on her lips till after death.

Dear Sister, kindly ask your community to pray for our good mother, to whom all of you owe your Religious Life. Our Mother, Sr. M. Louise and all of us ask this, while assuring you of our religious affection in Our Lord and in Our Father St. Dominic.

Sr. A. Augustina.

In the title-page of the participation we read:

“The Carcassonne Dominicans have the honour to participate the sorrowful loss of Sr. Marguerite De Gérine Fabre, their sister, ex-superior general of the Dominican Sisters with mother house in Albi, foundress of that house and all the branches in France, Italy and America. She passed away on 31<sup>st</sup> December at 75 with 55 years of Religious Profession, after receiving the Sacraments of the Church.

Pray for her!

The funerals will take place on Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1888, at 1,15 p.m., in the Parish of St Michael. We shall gather in the monastery room, House of the Dominican Sisters, Grand Rue,75<sup>51</sup>.

Following the funerals in the cemetery of Carcassonne, where after only ten months the remains of Sr. M. Louise Fabre would be buried, Sr. Augustina and Sr. Angelica, who had changed their residence from Carcassonne to Angen, acquired a grave in the cemetery where the remains of the two sisters were buried.

The remains of Mother Gérine were later on exhumed a second time and, after a regular identification, devotedly transferred into a new coffin, on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1925, was buried before the major altar of the Grande Chapelle of Albi, which had been inaugurated only two months before, on 30<sup>th</sup> August, feast of St. Rose of Lima.

***Separation of the houses in Italy from the Congregation of Albi (1879)***

Monsignor Bonhomme on page 272 and following relates the official correspondence between Albi and Italy concerning the resignation of Mother Gérine, the election of Sr. Alberta Lavergne and the decision of the separation taken in Italy<sup>52</sup>. He adds also some news regarding the election of Mother

Santa Croce Gayda and closes the argument by mentioning in his own style the affiliation to the Order, as well as the opening of a house in Rome, without saying anything at all about the obtained Pontifical Approval, with the Decree of Praise, by the Italian Congregation.

Through the documents in our hands, we can reconstruct the development of facts, whose true responsible protagonists were two : On the French side, Monsignor Ramadié who in a letter dated 8<sup>th</sup> December 1879, sent to the Archbishop of Fermo through his Vicar General, stated that he had no objection against the will of the Sisters in Italy to get separated from Albi, and that “he considered them as already independent from the Congregation of St. Catherine of Siena with Mother House in Albi”; on the Italian side, Sr. Augustina Pratviel, who wrote it clearly and confirmed it with her behaviour. Moreover, the Archbishop of Fermo himself, Card. A. Malagola, notified it to Ramadié:

“It has been brought to the knowledge of Your Excellency that the Houses of the Tertiary Sisters of St. Dominic established in Italy have separated themselves from those in France through the initiative of Sr. Augustina Pratviel”<sup>53</sup>.

I think that the majority of Sisters in Italy, unaware of what was happening, knew nothing till the separation was a datus of facts at a high level. I don't think it is exact what some Bishops say about controversies among the sisters.

The letter of Sr. Augustina, addressed to the Archbishop Malagola of Fermo, dated 6<sup>th</sup> October 1879, to apologize and to inform him of the initiative taken in Rome and of the decision already transmitted to Albi, explains the rapid development of her acting at record beat<sup>54</sup>. That September was full of events; on 3<sup>rd</sup> the resignation of Mother Géline, 7<sup>th</sup> the election of Sr. Alberta Lavergne; soon after the journey to Rome on behalf of Sr. Augustina with a companion; 12<sup>th</sup> a copy of the letter to Monsignor Puel is sent to Sr. Louise, in Carcassonne, requesting her to ask Mother Géline whether the sisters in Italy should submit themselves or not to Mother Alberta ; she begged her to reply with one syllable only, assuming that anyhow she would be waiting for her reply before taking any action. Did she actually wait? On 15<sup>th</sup>, only three days after, her answers were sent to the ecclesiastical superiors of Albi announcing

the separation. The letter, signed by seven superiors, had at the foot of the page the signature of the Archbishop of Fermo, who declared only that what was written in it was conform to the copy that had been given to him. Nothing else, because he, too, had been informed when things had already been concluded.

The houses in Italy remained under the authority of the Bishops who, before the end of the year, declared to take under their jurisdiction the houses of the Dominican Tertiary Sisters residing in their respective diocese, while waiting for the decision of the Holy See. The first to issue such a declaration was the Archbishop of Fermo, on 27<sup>th</sup> September 1899. He sent a copy of the letter to Monsignor Ramadié.

The expectation of the Bishop was protracted since the solution to be taken by Rome delayed to come and when it came it was not as they expected it to be. In fact, the iter of the practice met with many obstacles because it developed on two different grounds. On one side Sr. Augustina Pratiel with her Assistants, on the other side the Dominican Fathers who acted in full agreement with the Bishops. These had long been asking the Dominicans to assume the spiritual direction of the Sisters from France and of the Italians who had joined their community.

In the archives of Montemario and of the CIVCSVA there is a rich documentation that allows us to reconstruct the whole matter in details; we utilize it partly just to throw light on the phase consequent to the separation of the houses in Italy from those in France, a separation which has never been an inaccessible wall among the daughters of Mother Géline

Having overcome the sorrow for the destiny of Mother Géline,<sup>55</sup> Sr. Augustina tried immediately to solve the situation in her own favour and did not allow it to escape from her hands. She sought advice from the people he judged to be favourable to her. With womanly tactic, she attempted to approach even Fr. Campo-Antico<sup>56</sup>, who knowing her shrewdness, realized that she would not be fit to manage the destiny of the Tertiary Sisters in Italy .

Fr. Domenico Toselli, provincial of Lombardy, Fr. Paolo Benedicenti, Provincial of Piemonte, and above all the bellicose and acute Fr. Campo-Antico, Parish Priest of Santa Maria di Castello, Genova, were the fathers who, more than anybody else, felt it to be their task to revive on solid bases

the Religious Life of the sisters in Italy and to organize the acephalous houses, since with the resignation of Mother Géline the authority of the Provincial had expired.

Campo-Antico judged as absolute the government of Sr. Pratviel, being she endowed with a spirit of independence, imprudence and rebellion. He knew through direct experience that Sr. Augustina actually did not possess a religious sensitivity, that she neglected the formation of the sisters in order to insert them, still young, into the various activities. We must not forget that there was also Fr. Raymond Bianchi, Procurator General of the Order, to be in favour of the sisters in Italy.

These fathers were animated by fraternal love and by the decorum of the Order, but acted also with a mandate from their respective Bishops; they had in mind to constitute an Italian Congregation with new and efficient structures. They set on such work without omitting any particular. The Provincial of Piemonte turned to Fr. Cormier to ask him some form of Constitutions on which to compile a text for the sisters in Italy. Fr. Cormier sent to Italy a few texts of Constitutions he himself had written<sup>57</sup>.

Meanwhile Sr. Augustina, in a pathetic and mellifluous tune, begged Fr. Campo-Antico “to mediate for them with the Master General... to help them to become true Dominican sisters who would continue to safeguard the dying souls together and under the veil of the body”<sup>58</sup>.

Thanking Fr. R. Bianchi for his warning about the Constitutions for the “Gardes Malades”, Fr. Campo-Antico wrote:

“..Our Italian Nurses will have no asset and regularity if we do not start from the Provincial Superior who has been holding her office for sixteen years. She is superior but for the name and I wish her title... were of profit to the acephalous houses. I may be wrong, but I feel that Sr. Augustina is attached to the ephemeral office more than an ostrich to the rock. She knows too well that because of the Carcassonne question, she does not enjoy the esteem of her Congregation. I know her positive and very good aspects, yet her absolute, arbitrary, capricious government cannot but land dangerously. She thinks of new foundations.. With her ineptitude to settle the existing houses, how to open new ones?”<sup>59</sup>.

Fr. A. Luddi from Florence, who highly esteemed her to the point of

thinking that she could carry on her mandate further, wrote to Campo-Antico exhorting him to be happy for being uncharged by the Master General to work in favour of the sisters who assisted the sick; however he himself was contrary to make an exposition to the Holy See, assuring that Sr. Augustina had declared that she would not oppose anything that the Fathers would have done.

Fr. Benedicenti reminded Fr. Campo-Antico of the necessity to translate the Constitutions that had been sent by Fr Cormier from Marsille “so that all the sisters might read and learn them”. Though encouraging, yet he did not fail to express his perplexity.

“It is a vain illusion to believe that the Roman Congregation will recognize the Institute. . . Rome will never come to this decision unless there is already an existence that can offer a guarantee for the future!”<sup>60</sup>.

The objection was very prudent. However, after a week, he signed the petition and hoped to achieve the aim, without concealing his diffidence.

Also the correspondence of the Provincial of Bologna, Fr. D. Toselli, touched the same argument, but he revealed to have more courage by writing what he thought:

“The mentioned project of your most valuable letter dated 8<sup>th</sup> instant, concerning our sisters, is very good and hopefully will be welcomed in Rome. It is advisable, however, that Y.P. secures some strong support so that when the issue will be forwarded to the Sacred Congregation, it may not be left to sleep long in the shelves of the same Congregation. This Very Eminent Archbishop (it is Card. L. M. Parocchi) to whom I have given the participation, assured me of his fullest support and added that he, too, considered it to be a better chance the one suggested by Y.P. regarding the petition that it may be forwarded by the various directors of the houses collectively, rather than by the respective Ordinaries. He concluded by protesting that, if he had not yet taken any step towards Rome, as Sr. Augustina would have liked, it was because, knowing the person, he feared that the practice would be crossed by the subterfuges, tricks and swindles of the same, whom he considered to be the only, but strongest obstacle to the regularisation of the houses. Once you receive this letter, he wrote to Fr. Benedicenti, informing him very well about everything, and as soon as the petition is ready, please, send it to me for the signature which I will append with all my heart”<sup>61</sup>.

The directors, in fact, with the consent of the Diocesan Ordinaries, sent the petition to the Holy See in the month of September 1880 with the

purpose of provoking his final intervention on the question of the Tertiary Sisters in Italy<sup>62</sup>.

Meanwhile Sr. Augustina tried her utmost to reach her end, but Monsignor Pio Del Corona, Bishop of San Miniato, tried in vain to dissuade her with the following letter:

“Distinguished and dearest Mother, Several times you have expressed to trust me in everything and wholeheartedly. In your last letter you begged me to be your superior, manifesting to be my daughter and showing me the same deference and affection that are due to one’s own father. Now I avail myself of your tender and sacred affection to give you a useful piece of advice. I have studied the question, I have written letters duly answered, I have spoken with the superiors of the Order and thus have come to understand that the controversy is still pending with the Congregation that has the right to elect the superior of the Italian Sisters. . . . Being this the case, I have reflected before God that it would be necessary for the good of the sisters if you humbly and candidly resigned your office and came down along the line of the simple sisters, sending to the Master General a letter in which you declare to have resigned. At the same time it is good to write to all the Italian Sisters and to announce them that from now on they depend wholly on the Bishops and on the confessors until Rome will have. . . . This is my paternal advice.

I trust in your good heart, in the humility in which I seemed to see many shining rays, in your words, your letters. . . .”<sup>63</sup>.

Similar rays, however, are not visible in her proposals and acting !

During the year 1881 the epistolary activity of Sr. Augustina continued, while the Fathers prudently kept on waiting for the reply of the Holy See and proceeding in the compilation of the Constitutions. Sr. Augustina confided to the Prioress of Ascoli Piceno, Santa Croce Gayda, that through the interest of the Procurator General of the Order, things in Rome were proceeding well and that

“ . . . after the submitted clarifications, they had become favourable and solicitous . . . The Congregation will approve the Institute and the Rule and the Master General, entering the scene, will give the “diploma” of incorporation into the Order. After this, the communities will function regularly. . . .”<sup>64</sup>.

Soon after, with the naive illusion that it would be useful for her, she sent to Fr. Bianchi a copy of the letters written by the Bishops in Italy in 1877 in answer to a request of Mother Géline when she was working for the approval of the Holy See for the Congregation of Albi<sup>65</sup>.

The obscure reply he sent to her “We shall do whatever possible”, means a lot about what he thought of her. Moreover, he had come to know from the Provincial of Malta that Sr. Augustina would soon open a house in that island and that its actualisation depended “on the orders that you (Fr. Bianchi) will give to Sr. Augustina, if she is still the vice provincial”.

Can we imagine Sr. Augustina to depend on the orders of Fr. Bianchi, when she had not even listened to Fr. Toselli who had decidedly advised her not to send the young sisters so far!

In March of the same year, this is what she wrote to Fr. Campo Antico:

“V. Rev. Father, I deserve what you tell me and much worse, because unluckily it is true that I am a wicked person ! The Lord allows all these things to humiliate me. Please, allow me to draw advantage of these things for the sake of his love. However, what displeases me most, I must confess this to you, is to be considered shrewd , cunning and artful by Your Reverence. May the good Lord grant me to suffer this also for his love. I have always nourished a great reverence for Y.R., considering you as a true father and confiding to you all that passes through my poor heart, with sincerity and loyalty, just as I see them before God...”<sup>66</sup>.

Having come to know that the Congregation of VV.& RR. had postponed the approval to “ a more opportune time”, that is to a time when there would be a “Formal Rule”, with an authoritarian accent she wrote to Fr. Bianchi:

“I instantly request you to send me that book of the Rules, so that, after examining it, I may bring it to the knowledge of all the superiors of the Houses which I founded in holy obedience. Once I am assured that all the sisters intend to accept it, we can proceed to the election of the new superior General. For such an election we shall observe and conform to all the Rules prescribed”<sup>67</sup>.

The peremptory tone very well explains what Sr. Augustina was going

to do by forwarding an application to the Bishop of Casale (where the Community of Alessandria had recently transferred itself). But the Bishop wisely submitted it to the judgement of the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation of VV. & RR. with the following indications:

“Sr. A. Pratviel, the acting Provincial, has approached me with the request to give my consent to the gathering of all the superiors of her Institute in Italy, so that they may nominate regularly their superior general. I would be willing (perhaps this Bishop did not know the previous facts) to comply with this request, but to avoid errors, I beg Your Eminence to authorize me or at least to tell me whether I can do it or not and at what condition. I know that the case of these sisters is pending before the Congregation which is wisely presided by your Most Rev. Eminence, but I have been made to believe that the mentioned case would be considered positively and that far from jeopardizing would rather be favourable to the concerned sisters...”<sup>68</sup>.

The reply did not delay :

“The Institute is merely a Diocesan one and consequently, it is under the full and free jurisdiction of the Ordinaries”.

### ***The issue of the Directors in the Congregation of VV & RR (1880)***

Before the congress of the Cardinals met to take their decision on the issue of the directors, the text was entrusted to the study of two eminent consultants of the same Congregation, who declared themselves favourable to grant the request of the opponents. I herewith translate the very interesting integral text, which expresses the vote of the consultant Fr. Bianchi, O. P., which perfectly agrees to that of Fr. Stellai, a Barnabite, but is vaster and more detailed, being he competent as a procurator General of the Order of St. Dominic. I omit only the last part which is a list of names eligible to be Superior General.

It exists in France a diocesan Institute of Sisters called of St. Catherine of Siena, whose mother house is in Albi and which takes care of the sick in their own homes, of nursery schools, of the instruction and education of the girls.

The Institute has never asked and, therefore, has never had the approval of the

Holy See.

In 1862, the empress Eugenia sent some of these sisters to run a nursery school in Civitanova, diocese of Fermo, where Napoleon III had his estates. From then onward they spread in Italy where at present they have 13 houses. The Superior General sent there a Provincial. The houses in Italy, however, were not satisfied with the Institute (the causes are unknown), but the sudden election of the new Superior General without the vote of the sisters in Italy, seemed to be the last straw and the said sisters declared to the Archbishop of Albi that they intended to separate themselves from the Institute. The archbishop agreed to it and the above mentioned houses remained in an abnormal situation.

Wanting the sisters to put an end to this irregular state of things, through their directors, they turned to the Sacred Congregation to obtain. . . . I have nothing to add to the vote of the consultant, V.Rev. Fr. Stellati, since I find it very positive and clear. Having, however, been questioned on this point, I limit myself to give some clarifications that could eventually throw plenty of light on the case:

1 – The Albi Congregation has never been approved by the Holy See, has never been affiliated to the Order, as it would have been necessary to participate in its Indulgences and Benefits. The Institute has never cared for the Order and this has never cared for the Institute.

2 - The said Congregation does not possess fixed Constitutions: It has perhaps too many regulations, which, however, are not observed. I have been able to convince myself personally of this through a confession of the same French Sisters, on the occasions I had last year to visit quite a number of the principal houses existing in Italy.

3 – We can say that they have no idea of what the Noviciate is all about, though it is so much important. In all the houses they give the habit, even in the noviciate they serve the sick, or teach in the schools. After one year Mother Géline returned to France and the so called Provincial in Italy without any formality admitted the novices to profession. In other words I must say that the Congregation of Albi has in itself no principle of vitality, but is rather a

confusion.

4 – When in 1862 some of those sisters came to Italy, they multiplied themselves to the extent of erecting twelve houses in different dioceses where the respective Ordinaries gave them spiritual directors of the Order. These tried to inspire them to the true spirit of St. Dominic and to regularize their lives as much as possible. In part they succeeded in doing it, as it appears in the attestations of the Ordinaries, but they found a considerable obstacle in their so called Provincial, who has revealed herself to be independent, overbearing and despotic in the foundation of houses, in giving the habit and in the admission to Profession.

5 – The Master of our Order, though pleased with the work of the Italian Sisters, has never wanted to affiliate them to the Order, resolving to do it at the first favourable occasion. This is why I have kept on suggesting the directors of the sisters to try their best for the establishment of an Italian Congregation, separated from that of France, to the end of having it well organized and approved by the Holy See. This would guarantee for them a solid and lasting life. He added that after this it would be affiliated to the Order as a Congregation of the Third Order of St. Dominic.

6 – When I came to know that Monsignor. Ramadié from Perpignan was promoted to the See of Albi, I thought that the Congregation would soon be destroyed and the Italian one could be established. How could I foresee all this? This is how:

Because of my personal experience, I knew that Monsignor Ramadié was contrary to the Order and in general to Religious Institutions, particularly that of St. Dominic. He is equally against Canon Law. On his first visit to the seminary in Albi, he suppressed the “chair” saying that it was useless and that the school would do nothing but turn the clergy against him. This is what the diocesan papers refer to. The Capuchins also know it. Because of him they had to leave Perpignan. We had over there a monastery of nursing sisters of the Third Order. He kept insinuating to call themselves Sisters of St. Paul, of St. Anthony or any other saint, but not St. Dominic. He instituted two superiors in the same house, forbade them to give the habit or to admit to profession, tried every way, also not praiseworthy, to make them lose the religious spirit

of Dominican tertiary sisters.

On my side, I did whatever possible to save those poor sisters who actually were of admiration and example to the whole city. Everything was handed over to the Sacred Congregation when the late venerable and Most Eminent Card. Vitelleschi was its secretary. Their case was sent to the Holy Office. One day Card. Vitelleschi said that if the sisters did not want themselves to be destroyed, they should secretly leave and seek asylum in some other Diocese.

I referred everything to the sisters who, to the regret of the whole city, took refuge with the very good Archbishop of Auch who, having come to Rome, thanked me for the precious gift of sending the sisters to him. He praised them a lot. In the short span of 10 years they have got already 4 houses with a lot of good work.

This is why I thought that under the direction of Monsignor Ramadié the Albi Congregation, missing the vital lymph, would finish to exist. He started its destruction by asking the Superior General to resign and then making another one to his own taste, with the consent of a few sisters, without caring about the others, as I came to know two years ago, when I travelled to France.

7 – After all this, I truly find providential the separation, that has actually already happened, of the Italian Sisters from the Congregation of Albi. It seems to be a sign of God's will to save the Italian sisters.

8 – I believe that the Sacred Congregation can adhere to the request of the Directors, also because I am aware that the sisters are impatient to see themselves constituted in Congregation, under the direct dependence on the Holy See, respecting the rights of all the Ordinaries according to Canon Law.

I, therefore, would suggest that the following could be declared:

- a) that all the houses founded or to be founded in Italy be united in the Congregation of the Dominican tertiary sisters of St. Catherine of Siena;
- b) that the mother house would be established in Bologna as a more central locality- His Eminence Monsignor Parocchi would be extra happy, as he has told me verbally and has recommended this matter to me. At present they do not have a Mother House;

c) that consequently there be a unique Noviciate in Bologna for all the houses in Italy;

d) that for this first time the Sacred Congregation would nominate “ad nutum” a superior general with four assistants or counsellors, a Novice Mistress and a Bursar General; I shall put down a list of the sisters that could be nominated;

e) to commit under the direction and dependence of Card. Archbishop of Bologna the newly elected Mother General, the organisation of the mother house and the noviciate, as well as the drafting of the constitutions. To this end, having the mentioned constitutions not been found fit by the directors and the consultants, I have already sent to one of the directors a sample of constitutions of other Dominican Tertiary Sisters in France, already approved by the Sacred Congregation to be adopted “ad decennium”;

f) to intimate that everything is to be submitted to the Sacred Congregation.

CONCLUDING : Seen the good that the sisters are doing and the much more they can do when they will be better organized, as it is evident from the testimonials of the various Ordinaries, I recommend that the sisters be granted the requested grace.

Fr. Raimondo Bianchi of the Order of Preachers  
*Consultant*

Rome, Minerva 22<sup>nd</sup> July, 1881

Under this vote in handwriting we read:

Bologna Genova Suore Domenicane di Santa Caterina da Siena

3349 30<sup>th</sup> July 1881

12

In Congresso diei 11 augusti 1881

Pro nunc non expedire.

The Holy See, by intimating the “pro nunc non expedire”, prudently came to no decision, returning it to the Bishops under whose jurisdiction the Tertiary Sisters were.

At this stage, the only thing left was the initiative of the Bishop of the concerned diocese to untie the “empasse”. Finally it was the Archbishop of Bologna, Card. L. M. Parocchi, a Dominican Tertiary, to take the initiative.

Meanwhile, however, Sr. Augustina, before the end of 1881, “advised by most eminent persons”, sent to the Card. Prefect an exposition<sup>69</sup> in which she accused the Dominicans of undue interference in her houses. She validated her statements with plenty of stale particulars, as an expression of her distorted logic and of her disillusioned aspirations. It was her last chance to discredit the Dominican confrères by accusing them to breed disorders in her houses. She, however, submitted, for information, her exposition to the Archbishop of Fermo who forwarded it to the Roman Congregation with the declaration that nothing of what Sr. Augustina affirmed had actually happened in the houses of his diocese<sup>70</sup>.

The Congress of Cardinals, in fact, having examined the said exposition, on 26<sup>th</sup> January 1882, at the foot of the exposition wrote:

“Dilata usque ad exitum capituli”. The Chapter was being celebrated in Bologna on the same day.

#### THE CHAPTER OF BOLOGNA (1882)

“Hoc opus, hic labor”, this is what Fr. Campo-Antico wrote at the simple thought that, after the reply of the Congregation of VV & RR, the Congregation of the Tertiary Sisters was supposed to be established at Diocesan level. The previous attempt with the Holy See had been in vain due to the craftiness of Sr. A. supported by her advisers. Since the Archbishop of Fermo, who should have taken the initiative, had no courage to do it, the initiative was taken by the Archbishop of Bologna, who announced and convoked the chapter in Bologna with a letter dated 8<sup>th</sup> January, 1882, to all the Bishops. He requested them to send to Bologna, by 26<sup>th</sup> January, the Superior of each community, possibly accompanied by a sister who had the right to vote.

The Chapter was presided by the Archbishop. The capitulars were 34 from 18 communities. This is how Fr. Campo-Antico narrates the procedure of the events with the historical memo he left for us.

“At the first scrutiny the majority of votes, i.e. twenty, were for Sr. A. Pratiei. This ballot was not sanctioned by the Archbishop who, after trying

in vain to convince Sr. Augustina to renounce, proceeded to nullify it, protesting of doing it for motives of conscience which had privately been revealed to the elected sister. Such motives are documented in a long list that can be used if necessary. The cassation act had, therefore, nothing offensive, rather the Cardinal with delicacy and tact had embellished it by praising the elected and the electresses.

But both of these two remained inflexible, not to say rash, so that the second scrutiny was equally in favour of the repealed first elected : she received 15 votes against Sr. Santa Croce Gayda who received twelve of them, the remaining votes being divided among Sr. Eleonora Rudelle, Prioress in Turin, and Sr. Mary Muchard, Prioress in Bologna. Consistent with himself the Cardinal nullified also this second election. The most deplorable scene followed, provoked by a supporter of the presumptuous Pratviel and admirably overcome by the Bishop.

All this was cut off by the declaration that the eligible sisters were now Sr. Santa Croce Gayda and Sr. Mary Michard, according to the prescription of the Albi Constitutions professed by the Tertiary Sisters and “ appo loro vigenti de jure” though “non de facto”. In reality, as already said, they governed themselves arbitrarily, almost without laws.

On the third ballot, Sr. Santa Croce had 14 votes, Sr. M. Michard six. . . the remaining were white. The majority of votes, more than sufficient, the excellent qualities possessed and revealed by Sr. Santa Croce in the Government of the house in Ascoli, induced the Cardinal to confirm the election of the Superior General.

At the end of the election, the Chancellor of the Archbishop with no more ado, straight away drew up the related deed which Sr. Augustina herself signed purely and simply, without any word of protest. Sr. Augustina Pratviel continued to participate actively in the remaining affairs of the Chapter. She proposed as novice mistress Sr. Vincent Negri from the house of Civitanova, after accepting the office of assistant of Mother General that was offered to her!<sup>71</sup>.

### ***Sr. Augustina Pratviel after the Chapter of Bologna***

The Bologna Archbishop hastened to communicate to the Bishops the election of the Superior General of the Dominican Tertiary Sisters. At the

same time, he requested the prioress of Bologna to invite, on his behalf, the new superior general to visit the houses of Ancarano, Canzano, Colonnella, places of dissensions, and to inform the Archbishop of Fermo about the behaviour of Sr. Augustina during the chapter<sup>72</sup>.

Sr. Augustina, however, started to spread the news that the election of Mother Santa Croce was illegal. She also wrote to the communities not to submit to her. Here is one letter which she sent to Sr. Eleonora Rudelle, prioress of Turin, on 18<sup>th</sup> March, 1882.

“In the capacity that invests me, though unwillingly, I am compelled to remind you that the Chapter of Bologna on 26<sup>th</sup> January 1882, was illegal, as you yourself are aware, yet, it is certain that Sr. Santa Croce visits the houses of our sisters in the capacity of Superior General to fulfil the task of her canonical visitation. It is ascertained that it is illegal also the fact that she is introduced by a letter of the respective diocesan bishops to induce the sisters to obedience. This letter of mine is as a prevention : be prepared to answer that she will be recognized only after the approval of the Sacred Congregation, though unwillingly, because the majority was too much trampled upon.

So far for your norm and tranquillity. Do pray. Beware of what you do !

Your most affectionate

Sr. Augustina, Prioress Provincial

While expressing his desire of “seeing her in the government of the Institute with the satisfaction of everybody”, the Bishop of Ascoli, on 29<sup>th</sup> April 1882, advised Mother Gayda to go to Bologna where she was supposed to reside.

Some Bishops thought that it was good to inform the Holy See about what was happening among the sisters, and on 22<sup>nd</sup> April of the same year this is what the Congregation of VV & RR replied:

“We beg your Lordship to inform the above-mentioned sisters to stop appealing to the Holy See, since their Institute is under the immediate dependence on the Bishops.”

The mentioned Congregation replied the following to the Bishop of Fermo to whose diocese Sr. Augustina belonged;

“To the various Ordinaries who call the attention of this Sacred Congregation

onto the abnormal state of the Tertiary Dominican Sisters in Italy, whose main house, after their separation from the sisters in France is in your Diocese, Civitanova, the Sacred Congregation has constantly replied that it is the case of an Institute not recognized by the Holy See, therefore, merely diocesan and dependent on the individual Ordinaries. These can act in everything the way they deem to be convenient in the Lord, for a greater advantage of the Institute itself.

Nevertheless, in view of what your Lordship, with letter dated 9<sup>th</sup> May instant, writes about its difficult situation because of the interference of lay people provoked by the sisters themselves, it is not considered inopportune to communicate to Your Lordship the view of this sacred Congregation regarding the case.

First of all it is the question of Sisters who have separated themselves from an Institute in France and the Holy See has never encouraged such secessions or very dangerous schisms at all. The Church rather encourages the re-union of the separated parts to the Institute from which they separated themselves. In case a re-union of the houses in Italy with the Institute of France were not possible, we would require a document from the Archbishop of Albi, from which we can assume the legitimacy of the separation (the document existed. It was the letter which the Archbishop of Albi, Monsignor Ramadié, had written to the Archbishop of Fermo on 8<sup>th</sup> September 1879).

Secondly, let Your Lordship realize how reproachable is the conduct of the sisters, mainly of Sr. Pratviel, in provoking the interference of the laity in view of personal interests, hampering and opposing obstacles to the free exercise of the Ecclesiastical authority. Let Your Lordship not hesitate on these things and, with due prudence, admonish severely the sisters in order to safeguard and remain firm on the prestige of your authority.

Last of all, the Pratviel and her followers are wrong to complain against Card. Archbishop of Bologna who, in the chapter gathered there for the election of the superior general, refused to retain as eligible the above mentioned Pratviel who, having governed the Institute for many years, was for the same reason no longer eligible, according to the general norms of the Church, without an explicit pontifical dispensation, which is not accorded if not for serious reasons and is firmly denied whenever there are suspicions of hidden manipulations on behalf of the outgoing superior directed to obtain

her own election.

The Sacred Congregation nourishes the trust that, escorted by these suggestions, Your Lordship, in agreement with the other Ordinaries, may bring together the houses of the said Institute and restore a less abnormal situation, seen that the Pratviel, as you point out in your letter, has declared herself ready to submit to the mind of the Holy See. If, in spite of all this, the said person persists in her reproachable behaviour to keep herself in office, which she can no longer legitimately occupy, Your Lordship is advised to appeal to the Sacred Congregation to obtain from the Holy Father those rigorous measures against the refractory sisters that will be considered to be necessary. And this to restore in those communities the desired harmony and tranquillity without which the sisters cannot work for the good that the Lord expects from them in the Holy Church.

Waiting for the outcome of your practices, I wish you every prosperity from God. Of your Lordship....”

Seen that the Pratviel did not change her attitude, after more interference, the Holy See concluded the case with the following decision communicated to the Archbishop of Fermo on 25<sup>th</sup> August, 1882”:

“The letter of Your Lordship dated 5<sup>th</sup> instant concerning Sr. A. Pratviel of the Tertiary Dominican sisters in Civitanova, has been the object of a serious examination on behalf of the Sacred Congregation. The conduct of the said sister, even if previous to the letter of the Sacred Congregation dated 10<sup>th</sup> July instant, is highly reproachable and absolutely intolerable.

Kindly intimate the sister concerned on behalf of this Sacred Congregation to leave the house of Civitanova within 8 days and to return to her own Albi Institute in France. At the expiry of this time, please ask her to depose the habit immediately and deprive her from receiving the Sacraments until she obeys. She is also to be declared that the S.C. will not accept nor examine any of her complaints before she leaves for Albi, from where she is allowed to address her appeals to the Holy See.

Having events reached this extreme, it becomes absolutely necessary that your superior, with as much solicitude as possible, denounces the conduct of the Pratviel to all the Bishops in whose dioceses we find the houses of the Dominican Tertiary Sisters, informing them at the same time of the measures

taken by this SacroConsesso against the rebellious sister.

Waiting for the outcome, I wish you every prosperity in the Lord”.

On 29<sup>th</sup> September 1882, having travelled to Rome to protest once again, Sr. Augustina met the Jesuit Fr. Mancini who, in spite of seeing her for the first time, tried to persuade her to set on the right way of obedience to the Holy See (as she had written to M. Santa Croce). Then Sr. Augustine from Rome wrote to the Archbishop of Fermo stating that she had resolved to put herself entirely at his disposal, hoping to find in him a loving pastor. She also assured him that she would inform all the superiors about her decision. However, inconstant and changeable as she was, on 7<sup>th</sup> December she informed him that from the previous 23<sup>rd</sup> November, having taken off the religious habit, she was deprived of the sacraments, but she hoped to obtain the absolution from the Holy Father and to resume her normal Christian life.

She left the Bonaparte Nursery and, supported by the Mayor of Civitanova, she shifted to another house in the same city at Via del Paradiso, 5. It was there that with some sisters and postulants who had followed her, she established a lay society and opened a private nursery school.

In May 1884, with three ex sisters who lived with her, she asked pardon for her insubordination. We presume that this time she was sincere.

“When the situation seemed to be desperate, and the zealous Priest called by me to conduct the spiritual exercises, after eight days of rare patience, had already decided to abandon the reluctant sisters to themselves, the desired conversion of the heart suddenly took place and the worthy ecclesiastic could close his mission successfully.

Two days later, after signing the declaration, the converted sisters, according to the obtained faculties, took solemnly the Holy Communion in the altar of the Sacred Heart of the Parish Church, in the presence of many people who were edified as much as they had been scandalized by their obstinacy. They, moreover, wanted to write a letter whose copy I am also giving.

### *The Decree of Praise and Affiliation to the Order (1885)*

Meanwhile Mother Santa Croce from Bologna, mother house of the Congregation and the unique Noviciate House, tried to reconcile the souls in spite of difficult trials. She had to close some houses that had been founded recently, among which that of Malta. The houses in Tuscany remained under the jurisdiction of the Bishops.

Supported by the Bishops and above all by Fr. Bianchi, she had the joy of witnessing that the Congregation of VV and RR on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1885 issued the Decree of Praise for the Congregation in Italy and the Master of the Order, Giuseppe Larroca, on 21<sup>st</sup> May of the same year affiliated it to the Order accompanying the document with a very paternal message.

From that year's report of the Congregation we learn that the houses in Italy numbered 12 and the sisters one hundred.

Before the expiry of Mother Santa Croce's six years mandate, through the instance of Card. L. M. Parocchi, Vicar of His holiness as from 1884, and later protector of our Congregation, Pope Leo XIII, with a Decree signed by Cardinal Masotti, on 6<sup>th</sup> September, 1882, conferred to the house in Rome, recently opened, the title and prerogatives of Mother House and Noviciate, which had been in the Community of Bologna since 1882, and invited all the houses in Italy, that were still separated, to come together under the dependence of the Superior General elected in Bologna.

All these communities soon performed the act of obedience to the Superior General with great jubilation of all the sisters. The Congregation was finally re-united with the blessing of the Lord and of his Vicar, the sweet Christ on earth <sup>73</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

In concluding these few pages on the earthly life of our Foundress, Mother Géline Fabre, and brief history of the events concerning her daughters in Italy till her death, I can't help disclosing also a personal reflection on 3 sisters who were the protagonists of the particular events I have spoken of: Mother Géline, Sr. M. Louise Fabre, Sr. M. Augustina Pratviel.

The three have been relevant personalities throughout the course of this history and, in different circumstances they, at certain points, have been in conflict with the ecclesiastical authorities. Without judging the motivations, I limit myself to consider the difference in their attitude and their behaviour before the authority of the church.

Sr. M. Louise and Sr. Augustina, to defend their own purposes posed resistance and thus their projects went into fragments. M. Géline did not avail herself of human reasons, thus remaining always in the sphere of God's will.

M. Géline, humbly submitting to this will, chose to go physically far from her project and with this sacrifice she co-operated with the action of the Holy Spirit, thus consolidating the vitality of the Congregation, especially in Italy, which initially had to face such turbulent events. This renunciation, accepted and consumed till death, with full conformity to the will of God, benefited remarkably her work and her daughters, while she continued to immolate herself till her last breath.

Mother Géline, configured with the Crucified, is now alive in her glory, does not interrupt her maternal intercession so that her daughters may grow in the urgency of obeying the desire of Christ in His church: UT UNUM SINT.

## APPENDIX

### No. 1

Very Rev. Mother,

Not being able to write personally due to his multiple commitments, Monsignor has requested me to write on his behalf and to give you some detailed news on our journey and safe arrival in the United States.

Our sailing was fine with very few discomforts. Sr. Catherine and Sr. Rose were happy throughout the navigation. I left them at New York where they stayed for two days after which they went with Fr. Vilarrasa to the Convent of the Somerset Dominican Sisters. Monsignor accompanied them for a stretch of the journey and provided what they might have needed on the way.

He did not find it opportune to take them to California:

1. because they were still novices;
2. because His Excellency did not know whether he would find in S. Francisco a house fit for them.

Fr. Vilarrasa stayed 12 days with them and when he returned he told us that the good Sisters of Somerset had welcomed with joy the two French Sisters who soon felt at home and were happy. Just recently Monsignor has heard from them and has been told that they have already started to speak English.

With regard to us, Rev. Mother, we arrived happily at St. Francisco on 7<sup>th</sup> November; we are very busy over here and His Excellency has plenty of worries. Please, do pray for him that the Lord may grant him good health, so precious and necessary for the heavy responsibility that has been entrusted to him.

Sr. Mary de la Croix

So far Sr. Mary de la Croix has been writing to you on my behalf and I hope that you have received her letters as my own. We are very fine. The good Lord is also in California, not only to help us in our needs, but also in the hearts of several clever people. I have met many young women who wish to be Dominican Sisters. They have promised me some means to start. I wish I had two or three more sisters from Toulouse! I am obliged to you for the gift of Sr. Rose and Sr. Catherine. I hope that God may turn them into good instruments to plant

in California the daughters of our Fr. St.Dominic. I have already found some clever postulants and the required means. Couldn't you send me two or three more Sisters? I need them badly. I beg you to write to me and to remember me in your meditation, in your Communion, in your prayers and devotions. God alone!

My dear ones in Jesus Christ, God alone in our thoughts, our actions, our hearts. If we do this, God will be our great reward. Greetings to all of you. May God bless you.

Your Brother.

+J.Sadoc Alemany,O.P.

Bishop of Monterey- California

Fr. Vilarrasa asks me to write again, my good Mother, and to tell you that he has written to somebody in Spain asking him to send you a picture of Dominican Saints. He has not received yet any reply: this good father himself is very busy, nevertheless I think that he himself will write to you if you can read English or Spanish. He sends his greetings to you and community and recommends himself to your ardent prayers. Do not forget, I beg you, your poor

Sr. Mary de la Croix

April 1851

No. 2

Rome, 26 May, 1852

My daughter in Our Lord,

this short note will be handed over to you by a Sister who has come to Rome from California where she has seen Monsignor Alemany and the sister whom your community has sent for the new foundation. You will no doubt welcome the news which she will give you.

Perhaps she will soon come back to America, meanwhile I think that you will offer hospitality during her stay in your city.

Blessing you in the name of Our Lord and asking the assistance of your prayer for the Order and myself.

Fra A. V. Jandel

Vicar General o. p.

N.B. – The letter is addressed to the superior of Toulouse, but Fr. Jandel must have made a confusion. Evidently he speaks of a sister who could be Sr. Maria della Croce, Foundress of the Congregation of San Rafael of California, from the Monastery of Paris.

No. 3

DOMINICAN CONVENT OF SAN RAFAEL

SAN RAFAEL, CALIFORNIA

May 1992

Dear Mother General,

Many thanks for your letter dated 10<sup>th</sup> April. I am glad to have received it and to be able to give you some information about the two French sisters who came with Bishop Alemany from Albi to the USA in 1850.

Fr. Alemany was nominated Bishop of the far West of USA by Pope Pius IX, in 1850. Before leaving Europe for his very vast diocese, he asked the assistance of the Dominican sisters. Sr. Mary Goemaere of the Croix in Paris, Belgian by birth, volunteered to go with the Bishop and his companion, Fr. Sadoc Vilarrasa, O.P. Also two postulants from Albi, Rose Courbattieu and Catherine Coppe, volunteered. The group sailed from Liverpool, England, by the boat Columbus, on 11<sup>th</sup> October 1850. When they arrived in New York, the Bishop thought of sending the two young sisters to the Dominican Convent of St. Mary in Somerset, Ohio, for their formation. (The mother house is at present in Saint Mary of the Springs, Ohio). The following year two sisters went from the community of Somerset to California to join Mother Mary Goemaere.

The two French sisters remained in the Congregation of Ohio and never went to California.

Herewith enclosed, please, find information concerning Srs Rose and

Catherine. I received such information from the Sisters of St. Mary of the Springs. I have just received more information about the journey of the two sisters from Albi, whose copy I am herewith enclosing. I, too, would like to have the following pieces of information :

What is the relation between Toulouse and Albi? The two postulants joined the Bishop in 1850, but Albi was opened in 1852.

Where do the two sisters come from? Where were they born ?

Did they have any relationship with Fr. Lacordaire?

Many thanks once again for your letter.

Your most affectionate                      Signed : Sr. Martin Barry, O.P.

Archivist

*Two French Postulants.* This information comes from a letter of Sr. Hyacinth O.P., from St. Mary's the Spring, Columbus, Ohio, in 1963, to the archivist of San Rafael (California).

On his return journey to America, the Bishop (Alemany) was accompanied by his friend Fr. Sadoc Vilarrasa, by Sr. Marie Goemaere and by two postulants. They arrived in New York on 17<sup>th</sup> October 1850. It was considered convenient to exchange the two postulants with two professed sisters.

Saint Mary of the Springs

East Columbus, Ohio, U.S.A.

From an old register of the Council of St. Mary's

SOMERSET – OHIO.

The sisters Frances Stafford and Aloysia O'Neil left St. Mary's on 9<sup>th</sup> May to join the French sisters in Monterey, under the blessing of Bishop Alemany, O.S.D.

1850 – The two French novices, Rose Corbattieu and Catherine Coppe who had been brought to this country by Bishop Alemany, arrived in St. Mary's on 16<sup>th</sup> October and started their Noviciate on 1<sup>st</sup> November, All Saints Day.

Sister Ann

Novice mistress

On 1<sup>st</sup> November 1850, the postulants, Rose Courbattieu and Catherine Frances Coppé, received the habit of St. Dominic taking respectively the name of Sr. Rose and Sr. Catherine Frances. Both of them emitted their profession on All Saints Day, 1852. They said that Sr. Catherine's Father had strongly opposed the entry of his daughter to R.L. and that she offered herself for America to avoid the interference of her father in her vocation.

1851- I declare with joy that I have made my profession in the above mentioned convent according to the Rule and Constitutions of the Order of St. Dominic, Sister Joana Clark being the prioress of the convent and charged to receive my profession, Sr.M. Joseph McKernan Novice Mistress, Rev. Fr. Bowling director of the Convent. In their presence and with their testimony I undersigned my name, today, 1<sup>st</sup> November, 1851.

Signed: Sister Rose Courbattieu

Witnesses: Sister Dominica Wilson

Sister Philomena McDonough

1851- I declare with joy that I have made my Profession in the above-mentioned Convent according to the Rule and Constitutions of the Order of St. Dominic , Sister Joana Clark being the prioress of the Convent and charged to receive my profession, Sr. M. Joseph McKernan being Novice Mistress, Rev. Fr. Bowling director of the Convent. In their presence and with their testimony I have undersigned my name today, 1<sup>st</sup> November, 1851.

Signed : Sr.Catherine Françoise Coppé

Witnesses : Sister Dominica Wilson

Sister Philomena McDonough

Sr. Rose or Rosalie, whom the elderly sisters called Sister Rosie or "Rose French" became a member of the council in 1864. In 1865 she was sent to Zanesville; her name is in the list of the officials of the choir while the sisters were at Saint Joseph's in 1867. She was assigned to Nashville, Tennessee, in the autumn of 1868, but stayed there only six months. Later on, the same year, she was sent to Memphis where she taught French in the La Salette Academy, and offered her service as nurse during the epidemic yellow fever in 1873. She died at Saint Agnes in Memphis on 25<sup>th</sup> July 1876 and was buried in the small cemetery adjacent to

the Convent. An ex-student of La Salette writes : “. the sweetest memory of those days is Sister Rosalie, a little French sister very kind in her behaviour. We had small stools to sit around her and listened to her lesson on Baby Jesus and His Mother Mary.”

We know little about Sister Frances Coppé. When she left the convent erected by Fr. Lacordaire, the great orator gave her a leather belt that she wore always and kept like a treasure. Soon after Profession she was sent by the Provincial to St. Catherine’s in Kentucky. She died all of a sudden on 13<sup>th</sup> December 1878 in the Convent of the Holy Rosary, Louisville, where she had been as superior. (The first name of the convent, Saint Magdalene, was changed into that of St. Catherine in 1861).

#### No. 4

Monsignor De Jerphanion, Archbishop of Albi, to His Excellency  
Monsignor Gerbet, Bishop of Perpignan J.M.J.

Albi, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1862

Monsignor,

I felt it my duty to send Your Excellency the communication which reminded me of the letter which I have been honoured to receive from you; however, I entrust to your prudence the task of judging the consequence to be given to this fact. Like several of our colleagues, you consider it good to push the question forward. . . I like to believe that our instance will not be useless to the cause whose interest we defend.

I want to try my best, Monsignor, to give satisfactory answers to your questions concerning the Sisters of St. Dominic.

When Mother Géline was introduced to me by the Mayor of Albi, who had gone to meet her in Toulouse, I asked information on her Institute, on the Constitutions, etc. . . . Regarding this last point I did not find her too explicit, but having she already been accepted elsewhere, I welcomed her into my Diocese just as she was, proposing to realize what in the Congregation was left to be

desired. God has blessed the self denial and the zeal of these good daughters; their number has increased. They have opened several houses that depend on the House in Albi. I have understood that the time is ripe to regularize the relation of these foundations with their mother house. I shall see to this work and when I finish it I will have the honour of bringing it to the knowledge of Your Excellency. For the time being I agree with you that Mother Gérine must leave to the superior of the house of Perpignan the care and the government under your authority, Monsignor. She is absent at present. When she comes back I shall recommend her very clearly to keep Sr. Celeste in office and to assign Sr. Alfonsa elsewhere.

I have written to the ministry of the cults to inform them of my intention to be in Rome from 15<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> May. The reply has not delayed. His Excellency has found that my reasons are serious and has left me full freedom of action. I count to avail myself of it, unless unsurmountable circumstances will intervene. It would be a joy for me to meet you at the tombs of the Holy Apostles.

Kindly accept, Monsignor, the homage of my most respectful and devoted feelings in Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jerphanion J. M. J. Eugenio

Archbishop of Albi

No. 5

TO HIS EXCELLENCY MONS. RAMADIE

Archbishop of Albi

Monsignor,

We have come to know with great sorrow that Rev. Mother Gérine Fabre, Superior General for life of the Religious of the Third Order of St. Dominic, Foundress and owner of the house of Albi and of others existing in France, Italy and America, has been induced to resign from the office received by the major superiors to guide, for the whole of her life, the sisters of her Congregation.

For this reason I herewith communicate to your Excellency, on behalf of all the superiors of the houses in Italy and their subjects, that, having the bond which kept us strongly united to our beloved Foundress been broken, we consider

the local Bishops to be our legitimate superiors. Moreover we do not want to contest any further the election of the new Mother General, a thing that we could do since we have not been invited to give our votes.

We are forwarding this declaration also for other valid reasons, like the distance, the scarcity of means of communication with France and, above all, the diversity of culture and customs, seen that in this Province the majority of sisters is Italian.

At the end I wish to declare to Your Excellency that we have taken this determination not in a spirit of rebellion, but because we have felt forsaken and not considered; being in Italy, near the tomb of our Father St. Dominic, we wish to depend directly on the superiors of the Dominican Order that will be given to us by the Holy See, to whom we have appealed to implore the apostolic protection.

Kindly accept my homage and the assurance of my religious devotion. While imploring your pastoral blessing on all of us, I have the honour of declaring myself of Your Excellency

Most devote, humble and obedient  
Sr. Augustina Pratviel  
Provincial

15<sup>th</sup> September, 1879

No. 6

TO HIS EXCELLENCY THE ARCHBISHOP OF ALBI

Monsignor,

It has been brought to your knowledge that the houses of the Tertiaries of St. Dominic in Italy have detached themselves from those in France through the initiative of Sr. Augustina Pratviel. Having the houses been left without regime and rules of conduct, considering the good that the said sisters accomplish for the society and religion, some Italian Bishops turned to the Holy See asking to have a rule for them. The Sacred Congregation of VV & RR made us realize that the first thing to be done was the election of the superior general; very soon

under the presidency of His Eminence Card, Parocchi, Sr. M. Santa Croce Gayda was elected in Bologna. This election did not satisfy the pretext of Sr. Augustina who tried to contest its validity. Due to some disorders and with the approval of the Sacred Congregation of VV & RR, I have had to forbid Sr. Augustina, who is under my jurisdiction, to interfere in the houses of the Tertiaries, but the sister raised the flag of rebellion. Then the Congregation ordered me to intimate the deprivation of the sacraments if within eight days she would not go back to Albi, the only place where she could hope to for her complaints to be taken into consideration.

All attempts were made to persuade Sr. Pratviel to obey, always without result. In fact, though manifesting the will of submitting, she put off the religious habit and founded a lay society with some other Tertiaries from the House in Civitanova. The news of this event was brought to Her Majesty the Empress Eugene (ex-empress), foundress of the mentioned house, who recommended the expulsion of Sr. Augustina and followers if they did not submit to the Holy See. This also was all in vain, because Sr. A., protected by the Mayor of Civitanova and ready to be deprived of the sacrament of communion, bought a house in the city to start a nursery school. It is believed that the required money was given to her by her good mother, who probably did not know anything of what was happening. We must know also that Sr. Augustina has always kept hidden her city of origin, fearing perhaps that her mother would refuse to help her if she came to be acquainted of what was happening.

Now I wish to make another tentative to call Sr. Augustina back on the right path and efface the scandal. To this end I found it convenient to appeal to the charity of Your Excellency, in the hope that it be possible for you to know her city of origin and inform her mother of everything. I beg Your Excellency kindly to approach Madame Pratviel or to send me her address so that I myself may write to her. It would be very kind if Your Excellency could inform me on the piety, devotion and financial resources of the mentioned Madame.

While waiting for a reply, I thank and kiss the hands of your Excellency with the deepest veneration,

Most humble and obedient servant

Amilcare  
*Archbishop of Fermo*

Fermo, 18<sup>th</sup> August, 1883

No. 7

Most Rev. Excellency,

Being in Florence for my Spiritual Exercises, I received from France the folder that Sr. Santa Croce will hand over to you with the request of examining it. Considering the urgency of the folder I telegraphed the main prioresses so that they might think about the determination to be taken. Advised by a Dominican Father, two of us went soon to Rome where we contacted the V. Rev. Father General of the Preachers, Monsignor Sallua, other Rev. Fathers and distinguished persons all of whom urged us to submit a supplication to the Holy Father and advised us to write to the Archbishop of Albi (France) something like the supplication; this was done by us with solicitude. We hope to be excused by you for not making the first step towards Your Most Rev. Excellency, as our precise duty should have been .

Kindly believe, Your Excellency, that the main cause of that omission was our solicitude, for which we hope your goodness will forgive us and will take under your protection what we await from the Holy See the definition of the controversy.

We grasp this opportunity to present Your Excellency our dutiful respect and to thank you in advance for the benevolence we expect from Your Excellency. While kissing the sacred ring we profess ourselves of Your Most Rev. Excellency,

Most humble and devoted servant in Jesus Christ,

Sr. M. Augustina Pratviel

*Dominican Provincial*

Civitanova Marche, 6<sup>th</sup> October 1879

No. 8

Civitanova Marche, 26<sup>th</sup> October, 1879

My Most Rev. Fr. Director (Fr. Campo- Antico),

It has been impossible for me to satisfy the desire of my heart of getting you acquainted of all that we did in Rome. It is to be added also the fact that we were waiting for the Archbishop of Fermo to be with us. He honoured us with his

most precious visit last Friday, 24<sup>th</sup>. He celebrated the Eucharist in our church, gave the holy habit to three postulants, received the Profession of three novices and the renewal of vows of several sisters. Because of this and many more little things I have not been able to find an instant. However, today I am with you with a great satisfaction. I think that, as the best of our fathers, you will be pleased to know that everything went on very well, and we were confused on receiving the compliments of His Excellency from the altar before the whole congregation of people during the function. The other day He did exactly the same thing in the Cathedral before thousands of people, more or less. I must confess to you, as to a true father, that I was pleased for the good of our religion. In the Nursery, too, everything was wonderful and He was almost buried under bouquets of very sweet scented flowers. At the end He and everybody were very happy under all aspects. A thousand thanks to God for all the favours He bestows on us in spite of our nothingness. Please, join us in thanking him endlessly.

Oh! I am going too far. And Rome? Forgive me, father full of charity, this too naive digression of mine. I know that you are very busy, but for once I hope much from your great heart and I thank you in anticipation.

This is what we did in Rome where we went with the unique purpose of getting the approval from the Dominican Order. We went solicited by Very Rev. Fr. Ferrarini who told us that it was the most favourable time and we should delay not even a single day.

As we reached the eternal city, we went to meet the V. Rev. Father General (San Vito, sic), who after listening to us said, "We must first write to France to get detached from there. Your letter to the Archbishop of Albi could be supported by the Archbishop of Fermo, being this the place where you arrived from the very beginning. The Archbishop of Albi will reply to that of Fermo and this will write to the Holy See. Consequently we shall do what the Holy See will decide." Then in agreement with the Most Rev. Father General, Rev. Frs. Faletti, Saccheri, Lisié, Monsignor Sallua, etc., we prepared the papers and recommended by the Rev. Sr. Antonina Guireau to show them to you : the petition to the Holy Father, the act and the letter of the Archbishop of Albi, the letter to the Vicar General of Albi (Puel), Superior of the Dominican Sisters of Albi.

This is all till the present moment. Please, do tell us, without regard, whether you like all this; what you think of it and what you suggest us to do for the sake of God alone and his love. I have been

longing to know your mind about all this. Ah! I wish I could fly! But so many circumstances crowding together. Great God have mercy!

Now the Abbot Monsignor Auge, to whom Fr. Faletti (prior of Minerva where the Master General resided) recommended us in Rome, has written asking us to pray all the Bishops concerned to write for us a letter of recommendation.

My Most Rev. Father, kindly get such letter for us from there (Archbishop of Genova). Nobody could do it better than you under all aspects. We need it, as we are told, as soon as possible. May we hope to get it? You have always been very good!

Most Rev. Father, kindly accept our eternal gratitude along with our most humble respect, and bless us as we kiss your sacred hand.

Your most affectionate and devoted

Sr. M. Augustina Pratviel

*Dominican Provincial*

No. 9

Very Rev. Father Master (Campo Antico),

The project mentioned in your most valuable letter dated 8<sup>th</sup> instant concerning our Sisters is very good and we hope that it will be welcome in Rome; it is advisable, however, that Y.P. gets some support over there so that when the instance will be introduced to the sacred Congregation it may not have to sleep too long in the drawers of the same.

The Most Eminent Archbishop with whom I shared it, assured me of his full approval and added that he, too, considered more reliable what Y.P. had suggested concerning the instance, that it be forwarded by the Directors of the different houses collectively, rather than by the respective Ordinaries; he concluded by saying that, if he had not made any step as yet with Rome, as Sr. Augustina would have liked, it was because, knowing the subject, he feared to see the case to be interfered with by the subterfuges and tricks of the same, whom he considers to be the only and strongest obstacle to the regularisation of the houses.

Once you receive this letter, feel free to write to Fr. Benedicenti and inform him well of everything and as soon as the Instance is ready, send it to me

for the signature which I will append wholeheartedly.

Accept my sincerest greetings and believe me to have the honour of calling myself,

Most devoted Servant of Your Reverence,

Fr. Domenico Toselli, O.P.

*Provincial*

Bologna, S.D. 10 September, 1880

No. 10

From the Archive of CIVC-SVA

F9

Most Eminent Mr. Cardinal Prefect,

The infra-written speakers, in their capacity of Spiritual Directors of the Tertiary Dominican Sisters called Nurses, with the previous approval of their Most Rev. Ordinaries, bowing for the kiss of the Purple Robe, humbly expose that:

the Institute of the mentioned sisters is praiseworthy because of its beneficial commitment to religion and to charity towards the infirm, the Nursery and primary schools, as testified by the recommendation letters of the V.Rev. Ordinaries, and by its spreading in various parts of Italy where it counts twelve good houses. These houses were erected during the eighteen years that have lapsed from the time when, through the piety of the Empress Eugene, some of its sisters left France for Civitanova Marche with the aim of opening in it a nursery school that is still going on, in favour of the people who live in the very vast properties of Her whose husband was Napoleon III.

As branches of the French Congregation of St. Catherine of Siena, with Mother House in Albi, the mentioned houses remained united to it with bonds of subjection, depending immediately on the Provincial nominated by the Mother General who resided in the above-mentioned city of "Provenza".

However, the sudden resignation, believed to be imposed, of the old Mother General and the not less sudden substitution by a new one, through an election to which the sisters with the right of vote residing in Italy were not invited, strongly disturbing them, shortened the time of an event that later would have been made indeclinable by other causes.

We mean the separation of the Dominican Tertiary Nurses in Italy from those in France, an event already happened, accomplished and sanctioned, as we can see from the declaration of Monsignor Archbishop of Albi along with the Bishops' letters of recommendation.

But the obtained separation has caused uneasiness and disorders, keeping disintegrated and weak the body of the numerous Italian Houses deprived as they are of an authority that would bind them in the unity of a legitimate leader; which, surely, is not the competence of the so called Superior Provincial who, having governed them abusively for the span of fourteen years, is today deprived even of the coloured delegation which she had been given initially by the already resigned Superior General, as mentioned above.

Consequently the Nursing Sisters of the said houses, having been for one year without an authoritative leadership and being guided arbitrarily, not always prudently, deserve compassion for their feeling unhappy and perplexed about their future which is compromised by a too much prolonged provisional situation. This, by sure, does not favour the cohesion of their feeling and hearts, nor allows the introduction of the more regular observances wanted by the same sisters, among which the most urgent is the institution of a stricter and unique Noviciate.

Seen this state of things, and speaking on behalf of the houses whose directors they are, and interpreting the desire of the others, all without distinction warm for the observance and the edification of the Neighbours, the applicants turn to Your Eminence requesting those measures that are considered to be indispensable for the purpose.

According to them the urgent and fundamental measures they need are:

1. The erection of all the Houses to one Congregation that they would pride themselves of being called of St. Catherine of Siena.

2. The Institution of a Superior General made for the first time by the Holy See, for a time that will be determined.

3. The adoption, ad experimentum for a period of 1 year, of the Constitutions that are observed by the Tertiary Dominican Nurses of Auch and of Mende with the approval of the respective Most Rev. Ordinaries and with the affiliation to the Order of Preachers.

After these considerations and petitions exposed with trust and veneration, the speakers declare themselves of Your Most Rev. Eminence.

Very humble, obliged, devoted servants

Signed:

- From San Domenico in Bologna

14 September 1880

Fra Domenico Toselli dei Predicatori

Provincial of Lombardy

Director of the Tertiaries in the same city.

- From San Domenico in Torino:

29<sup>th</sup> September 1880

Fr. Paolo Benedicenti of the Preachers

Prior Provincial of the Province of St. Peter Martyr

Director of the Tertiaries of the mentioned city

- From Santa Maria of Castello in Genova

27<sup>th</sup> September 1880

Fr. Tommaso Camp-Antico of the Preachers

Parish Priest-Director of the Tertiaries of the said city

- From Santi Giovanni e Paolo in Venice

23<sup>rd</sup> September 1880

Fr. Domenico Rossi of the Preachers

Parish Priest-Director of the Tertiaries of the said city

- From Parrocchia dei Santi Stefano e Martino in Alessandria:

30 September 1880

Prevosto Pietro Casalini

Parish Priest-Director of the Tertiaries of the said city

*The text has the following note:*

To the Most Rev. Fr. Stellati for the vote.

26<sup>th</sup> November 1880

No. 11

AGIOVIII400B1

Civitanova Marche-Asilo, 17 February 1881

Rev. Father Procurator General,

Having heard with immense consolation from Monsignor Del Corona that to Your Most Rev. Paternity have been entrusted all the papers relating to the cause of the Tertiary Sisters in Italy, I hasten to forward ten letters of recommendation that were written in 1877 to the same purpose, by our Most Rev. Bishops. I send them to you so that they may hasten the great day that will bring joy to our hearts.

Please, Most Rev. Y.P., help us and we shall be grateful to you for ever.

The other letters of recommendation were handed over by me in September instant to Rev. Fr. Campo-Antico in Genova and I like to believe that he has transmitted them to Y.P.

Accept my most respectful homage and the expression of our sincere gratitude. I kiss your hand and implore your blessing on myself and on my sisters.

Of the Most Rev. Procurator General,

Very devoted and obedient daughter,

Sr. Augustina Pratviel

The following note is handwritten by Fr. Bianchi:

To Sr. Augustina - Civitanova, 26<sup>th</sup> February 1881

What can be done will be done.

No. 12

Civitanova Marche-Asilo, 22<sup>nd</sup> March, 1881

Very Rev. Father,

I deserve what you tell me and even worse things; unfortunately it is true that I am very bad. The Lord allows all this to humiliate me. May he grant me to avail myself of everything for the sake of his love only!!!

What pains me most, allow me to confess it, is to be considered by Y.R.P. as cunning and artful. . . May the good God grant me to suffer also this for pure love of him !! I have always had a great veneration for Y.P. and have been considering you as my true father, confiding to you all that passed in my poor heart with all sincerity and loyalty just as I saw them in myself before God. The same I did with Sr. Antonina, except for sins, of course. Oh, my God, help me !!!

With regard to Alessandria, having already rejected this year 5 applications, not to do authoritarian acts, I left the others to act by themselves, and they felt free ; only at the end, compelled by the repeated insistence to avoid a worse evil, not knowing whom to turn to, I said, "Go ahead". I wish I had never said it ! However, I prayed so much for it and I do hope that God will not hold me responsible, since I did it only to fulfil his will.

I hope that the Sacred Congregation does not condemn it, for the sake of so many good sisters.

With regard to the sisters in Alessandria who were called there, I would not have called them back if Sr. Antonina had not written to me that she had been requested by them twice and wanted me to say if she had to send them back. I naturally answered in the positive knowing that the patients over there needed the sisters, at least according to what had been written to me.

Kindly, forgive me for love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, of St. Dominic, etc. I hope all this from your "well built" heart and I thank you in advance. Kindly bless me for pity's sake, and believe me also that many times I have been scolded by my most familiar superiors for being too sincere. Whenever somebody suggested me some sort of wiliness, I would answer with persuasion, "The best wiliness is that of not knowing any."

I tell you all this in pure truth as if I went to confession, because I don't want to harm anyone.

Accept along with my very respectful homage my deepest gratitude, by which I have the honour of kissing your hand of and declaring myself,

your most humble and obedient daughter,

Sr. Augustina Pratviel

P.S. When we have a legitimate superior, with the help of God, you will see how we can obey as I now obey my Archbishop Confessor.

No. 13

Most Rev. Father Procurator General,

Knowing and having been promised by Your Paternity to be our most zealous Protector, we thank immensely and constantly God with all our heart, and we beg you to allow us to confide as to the best of our Fathers that, as Your Paternity already knows, we received the following reply from the Sacred Congregation of the Bishops and Regulars: "At a more opportune time." This means that the Congregation does not want to recognize a Religious Family like our own until we are seen subjected to a Formal Rule like other communities, and we conform ourselves to such rule of life.

Things being like this, Most Rev. Father, I was answered through Mr. Canonic Boccafogli, that Your Most Rev. Paternity keeps a Rule of Life already approved by the Holy See for other Institutes similar to ours for the purpose of public charity and the good of neighbours.

I wish to make an instant request of such a Book of Rules so that, after examining it, I may bring it to the knowledge of all the superiors of the Houses founded by me through holy obedience and, after realizing that all the religious intend to accept it, we could proceed to the election of the Superior General. For such election we would follow and observe whatever prescribed by the Rules that will be given us by Your Most Rev. Paternity.

Kindly grant these religious desires of mine so that we may see the end of the division in the actual situation and thus forward our case to the Congregation VV & RR. I know that we would soon obtain the approval of the Institute, considering that there is nothing one can condemn in the conduct of my Religious, as it is evident through the letters of recommendation of all the Bishops in whose diocese are the houses of the Dominican Tertiaries.

All that you will do, Most Rev. Procurator General, will be of benefit of many Sisters who, by taking the Dominican Habit, intend to serve more perfectly the Lord. For the sake of the most holy Heart of Jesus, please, help me and you will not miss, Most Rev. Father Procurator General, the sincere gratitude of all my Religious and my own. We shall keep you always in our prayers.

I humbly kiss your hand and ask you to bless me as well as all my sisters, declaring myself most humble and obedient daughter of Your Most Rev. Father Procurator General,

Sr. Augustina Pratviel

Civitanova (Marche), 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 1881.

There is the following hand note of Fr. Bianchi:

Mother Augustine – Civitanova, 9<sup>th</sup> October, 1881

Reply : The Constitutions have already been sent and they are expected to be translated.

No. 14

Archives CIVCSVA F9

Most Rev. Eminence,

The facts that Sr. Augustina relates in the memo that with homage I return to Your Most Rev. Eminence are brought to my knowledge by the same applicant, who has complained with me about those disorders more than once. Nothing of what she says has actually happened in the two houses of the Dominican Tertiaries that exist in my archdiocese, since there is no Dominican Religious over here.

What seems undoubtedly sure about these sisters is the abnormal condition in every aspect in which they find themselves after their separation from

their sisters in France. This situation is too disastrous for the good running of the existing houses and is an obstacle against a further development of the Institute. It is, therefore, urgent the need of some measure. Meanwhile, the authority of the protester being considered to be over, due to the separation of the sisters in Italy from their mother Congregation, the Most Eminent Cardinal Archbishop of Bologna has been a promoter among the other Most Rev. Ordinaries with the houses of these sisters in their dioceses, to proceed to the election of the Superior to be recognized by all the houses in Italy who will forward to the Sacred Congregation, for the due sanction, the new Rules of the Institute. To this end all the superiors of the different houses have been asked to meet in Bologna on 26<sup>th</sup> instant.

Nothing else but to confirm your Eminence the sense of my deep homage, while humbly kissing your Holy Purple Robe.

Most humble and obedient of Your Most Rev. Eminence,

Amilcare  
*Archbishop of Fermo*

Fermo, 14<sup>th</sup> January 1882

Under the text of this covering letter it is written:

Fermo

The Superior of the Dominican Tertiary Sisters (already Provincial) of the Civitanova House, asks that the Institute be subtracted from the interference of the Dominicans.

In Congregation, 26th January 1882  
DILATA USQUE ADE EXITUM CAPITULI

No. 15

Very Rev. Mother General,

Here are the instructions I have been asked to communicate to you and to which you are to abide.

With reference to your letter of yesterday, the advice of not exercising any act of power has been given to you by the Secretary of Monsignor. Archbishop

of Fermo. Since such advice has not been suggested by Your very worthy Monsignor Bishop, it does not forbid you at all to carry on what was suggested to you by His Most Rev. Eminence, to settle things in your house of Ascoli and, having done this (even before if convenient to you) you may visit the houses of Ancarano, Canzano and Colonnella to get information on the state of these houses, to take exact note of the sisters who live in them with their respective name, surname, nationality, age, whether professed or not, of simple or perpetual vows, the years of R.L. Above all do not omit to seek information on their conduct. All this you are expected to do also with the postulants, if eventually present in the houses.

After accomplishing this visit, before going back to Bologna, go to Fermo, meet Monsignor. Bishop and inform him of Sr. Augustina's behaviour on the occasion of the Chapter that was held here, after which you may go back to Bologna, omitting the visit to the Houses of Fermo and Civitanova, unless you are requested by the above praised Monsignor Bishop.

Follow these instructions as a guarantee, since they come from this Most Eminent Archbishop.

While renewing my most respectful homage on behalf also of my community, I kiss your hand and with the vivid desire of seeing you soon among us, with deep esteem I repeat to be of Y.M. most humble and devoted daughter,

Sr. Maria Michard  
*Dominican Prioress*

Bologna, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1882

No. 16

Most Rev. Mother General,

Having received the Pontifical Decree, I have soon felt to be my very sweet duty to write to the Superiors of the two Houses of Lari and San Rocco in Larciano, intimating your communities to submit themselves to the Decree and to your Motherhood.

We were told that the Houses in Tuscany were supposed to depend fully

on the Ordinaries, while the case of the Congregation was pending in the Congregation of Rome.

Now that Rome has spoken, we entrust the daughters in the hands of their legitimate mother, and obey the Pontiff who speaks in the name of Christ.

I believe that the houses of the other diocese will do the same, and that Your motherhood will soon have the joy of extending the blessed and maternal shadow on all the Little White Nuns who are loved and venerated by the people.

I wish you, Rev. Mother, a supreme joy at the very start and the continuation of your government on which the Blessed Virgin may extend her mantle of love.

I bless you and all your daughters gathered in the new House.

Most affectionate in Jesus Christ and in St. Dominic

Fr. Pio Alberto of the Preachers

*Bishop*

San Miniato, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1887

## FOOT NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Registro della cattedrale di Saint - Flour, Annata 1912.

<sup>2</sup> Mère Gérine, Compte rendu du travail sur Mère Gérone demandé par les Prieures Générales d'Albi et d'Italie, 1995-1999. Période Historique étudiée: 1842-1879.

<sup>3</sup> G. Cormier: La Regola e lo spirito del Terz'ordine di San Domenico, spiegati in 12 dialoghi, Memorie Domenicane, Roma 1898.

<sup>4</sup> Mother Gérine to Cardinal Archbishop of Fermo, Pau, 27<sup>th</sup> March, 1877.

<sup>5</sup> Fr. B. Montagnes, O.P., L'Ordre en France de la Révolution a Lacordaire. Page 360: "Sr. Gérine on 1842, with the help of other tertiary sisters in Chaudesaigues, founds a Dominican Regular Third Order. . . .and introduces the Rule of the Third Order, 1817, already used by the Fraternity of Chaudesaigues".

<sup>6</sup> Pagenelle, the Parish Priest of Chaudesaigues, to the Vicar General of Toulouse, 20<sup>th</sup> December 1841. No distinction is made here between Lay Third Order and Regular Third Order, a sign that the concepts of this matter were not clear enough.

<sup>7</sup> Duchambon, a canon of Saint-Flour Cathedral, to the Vicar General of Toulouse, 30<sup>th</sup> June 1842.

<sup>8</sup> Pagenelle, *ibid*, 21<sup>st</sup> May 1843. It reveals the tenderness of a spiritual father towards these poor young Tertiaries who try to organize themselves in a regular life.

<sup>9</sup> Caubel, Vicar General of Rodez ; Letter dated 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1843. He contacts Mother Gérine for the case of Gramond.

<sup>10</sup> Fr. B. Montagnes, in the quoted text, page 260, says ; "She (Mother Gérine) co-operates with the Congregation of Gramond at its start, 1843-1844, . . .the five teachers belonging to the Third Order are entrusted to the direction of Sr. Jurine of Chaudesaigues, who has been living in Toulouse for a given time as head of a community founded by her.

<sup>11</sup> Combal to Madame de Bebian, Gramond, 16<sup>th</sup> August, 1843.

<sup>12</sup> Ctsse de Montvallat to Sr. Jurine, Toulouse, 10<sup>th</sup> October, 1844.

<sup>13</sup> Sr. Saint- Francois to Mother Gérine, Gramond, 8<sup>th</sup> October, 1852.

<sup>14</sup> Sr. Saint -Francois to Mother Gérine, Gramond, 20<sup>th</sup> September, 1855.

<sup>15</sup> Sr. Saint-Francois to Mother Gérine, Gramond, 1<sup>st</sup> June, 1873.

<sup>16</sup> Fr. Narcissus Palol, to Mother Gérine, Lezat, 18<sup>th</sup> June, 1848; 18<sup>th</sup> January 1849, Gerone, 15<sup>th</sup> August 1849, Lezat, 20<sup>th</sup> June, 1851.

<sup>17</sup> Sr. Maria O.P. to Mother Gérine, Chalon, 6<sup>th</sup> May, 1851; Sr. Augustina, prioress, to

Mother Gérine, Chalon, 7<sup>th</sup> January, 1852.

<sup>18</sup> Lacordaire to Madame de Montvallat, Bordeaux, 14<sup>th</sup> March, 1842.

<sup>19</sup> Lacordaire to Sr. M. Louise, Paris, 21<sup>st</sup> September, 1849.

<sup>20</sup> Lacordaire to Sr. Gérine Fabre, Flavigny, 6<sup>th</sup> August, 1852.

<sup>21</sup> Letters from Sr. Marie, prioress of a Dominican Monastery, to a sister, Paris, 1<sup>st</sup> July 1851 and 10<sup>th</sup> October 1851.

<sup>22</sup> Letters to Mother Gérine, Liverpool, 11<sup>th</sup> September, 1850; California, April 1851.

<sup>23</sup> Piéchaud, Parish Priest of Saint-Etienne, Toulouse, to Mother Gérine, 2<sup>nd</sup> November, 1848.

<sup>24</sup> M. Louise to Mother Gérine, Carcassonne, 26<sup>th</sup> November, 1848 and 11<sup>th</sup> January, 1849.

<sup>25</sup> Certificate from Monsignor De Bonnechose, Archbishop of Rouen, 9<sup>th</sup> January, 1872.

<sup>26</sup> In the declaration signed by a priest we read that in 1864, the major superior of the community of St. Dominic in Toulouse, according to the norms of the Council of Trent conducted the canonical exam and admitted the postulants to their Religious Clothing.

<sup>27</sup> Jugement rendu par le Tribunal Civil de Toulouse le 10 mai 1901 par la Première Chambre.

<sup>28</sup> Piéchaud to Mother Gérine, 11<sup>th</sup> September, 1849.

<sup>29</sup> Letter from California, April, 1851. Appendix No.1.

<sup>30</sup> Letter from Fr. V. Jandel, Vicar General of the Order, to the Superior of Toulouse. Mother Gérine Fabre, Rome, 26<sup>th</sup> May, 1852. Appendix No.2

<sup>31</sup> Bonhomme, page 285. The quotations from the pages of Bonhomme are taken from the Italian Translation.

<sup>32</sup> Letter from Saint Raphael, California, to Mother Pia Quochi, 1992, with attachments. Appendix No.3

<sup>33</sup> Albi, letters from the city mayor to the Sisters of St. Dominic in Toulouse, 5<sup>th</sup> May, 1852; 25<sup>th</sup> May, 1852; 27<sup>th</sup> June, 1852.

<sup>34</sup> The Newspaper of the Tarn, 4<sup>th</sup> September, 1852, announced the arrival of the sisters who could work in the whole diocese.

<sup>35</sup> Monsignor E. De Jerphanion to Monsignor Gerbet, Albi, 8<sup>th</sup> April, 1862. Appendix No.4

<sup>36</sup> Historique de la communauté de Perpignan, par Gil Reicher (after 1939)

<sup>37</sup> See foot-note 35.

<sup>38</sup> Fr. Jandel, Master of the Order, to the Prioress of the Nursing Sister of the Third

Order in Perpignan, 21<sup>st</sup> May, 1871.

<sup>39</sup> Monsignor Ramadié, Bishop of Perpignan, to Fr. Jandel, 23<sup>rd</sup> August, 1871; 13<sup>th</sup> September, 1871. On Ramadié, Gallican Bishop, see GERARD CHOLVY, Gallicans et Ultramontains, Mgr. Ramadié successeur de Mgr Gerbet à Perpignan (photocopy).

<sup>40</sup> Fr. Jandel to Monsignor Ramadié, 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 1871.

<sup>41</sup> Fr. R. Bianchi in Congregation of VV and RR, 22<sup>nd</sup> July, 1881 (the whole text on page..)

<sup>42</sup> M. Mocquard, notary, to Mother Gérine, 8<sup>th</sup> November, 1862.

<sup>43</sup> M. Mocquard, notary, to Mother Gérine, 8<sup>th</sup> November, 1862.

<sup>44</sup> Letter by Mother Gérine to the Archbishop of Fermo (see foot-note 4).

<sup>45</sup> Letter of Sr. Augustina Pratviel to the Congregation of VV and RR, 10<sup>th</sup> December, 1881.

<sup>46</sup> GBeduelle-ALAIN QUILICI, Les Frères Precheurs autrement dits Dominicaines, Le Sarmant, Fayard 1997, page 276.

<sup>47</sup> Constitutions, 1872.

<sup>48</sup> The Rule of the third Order had penetrated deeply not only in the mind of Mother Gérine, but also in that of her daughters. This is proved by the fact that it is found; in the formula of Profession, Constitutions of 1872; the same is mentioned also in the formula of the old registers of professions in Italy and in the letter by Mother Gérine to the Bishops in 1877; we find it also in the formula for the profession in the Italian Constitutions of 1885. Finally it was deleted from the text of the Albi Constitutions submitted, for the approval, to the Congregation for Religious, in 1920.

<sup>49</sup> The original of this letter is in the general archive of Montemario.

<sup>50</sup> The original of this letter is in the diocesan archive of Fermo.

<sup>51</sup> The original is in the General Archive of Montemario.

<sup>52</sup> Besides the letter quoted by Bonhomme, on 15<sup>th</sup> September, 1879, Sr. Augustina Pratviel wrote directly also to the Archbishop, Monsignor Ramadié. Appendix No.5.

<sup>53</sup> Monsignor A. Malagola to Monsignor Ramadié, Fermo, 18<sup>th</sup> August, 1883. Appendix No.6

<sup>54</sup> Sr. Augustina Pratviel to the Archbishop of Fermo, Civitanova, 6<sup>th</sup> October, 1879. App. 7

<sup>55</sup> Sr. Augustina to Mother Gérine, Civitanova, 26<sup>th</sup> October, 1879.

<sup>56</sup> Sr. Augustina Pratviel to Fr. Campo-Antico, Civitanova, 26<sup>th</sup> October 1879. Appendix No. 8.

<sup>57</sup> Fr. G. Cormier to Fr. Provincial, Marsiglia, 18<sup>th</sup> June, 1880.

<sup>58</sup> Sr. Augustina Pratviel to Fr. Campo-Antico, Firenze, 19<sup>th</sup> July, 1880.

- <sup>59</sup> Fr. Campo-Antico to Fr. Bianchi, Genova, 30<sup>th</sup> August, 1880.
- <sup>60</sup> Fr. Benedicenti to Fr. Campo-Antico, Torino, 16<sup>th</sup> September, 1880.
- <sup>61</sup> Fr. D. Toselli to Fr. Campo-Antico, Bologna, 10<sup>th</sup> September, 1880. Appendix No.9.
- <sup>62</sup> Instance of the five directors to the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation of VV. and RR. September 1880. Appendix 10.
- <sup>63</sup> Monsignor Pio Alberto Del Corona, Bishop of San Miniato, to Sr. Augustina, December, 1880.
- <sup>64</sup> Sr. Augustina Pratviel to Sr. Santa Croce, Prioress in Ascoli, Civitanova, 1<sup>st</sup> February, 1881.
- <sup>65</sup> Sr. Augustina Pratviel to Fr. R. Bianchi, Civitanova, 17<sup>th</sup> February, 1881. Appendix No.11.
- <sup>66</sup> Sr. Augustina Pratviel to Fr. Campo-Antico, Civitanova, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1881. Appendix No. 12.
- <sup>67</sup> Sr. Augustina Pratviel to Fr. R. Bianchi, Civitanova, 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 1881. Appendix No.13.
- <sup>68</sup> The Bishop of Casal Monferrato to the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation of VV. and RR. 28<sup>th</sup> November, 1881.
- <sup>69</sup> Memo of Sr. Augustina Pratviel to the Prefect of the Congregation of VV. and RR.
- <sup>70</sup> Letter of the Archbishop of Fermo to the Prefect of the Congregation of VV. and RR., 14<sup>th</sup> January, 1882. Appendix No. 14.
- <sup>71</sup> Report of Fr. Campo-Antico, a manuscript in the general archive of Montemario.
- <sup>72</sup> Letter from Sr. Maria Michard and Mother Santa Croce Gayda, Bologna, 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 1882. Appendix No. 15.
- <sup>73</sup> Letter from Monsignor Pio Alberto Del Corona to Mother Santa Croce, San Miniato, 2<sup>nd</sup> December, 1887. Appendix No.16.

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Translated by Sr. M. Imelda Fortuna O. P.  
for the use of the Congregation

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