

ANGELO SARDONE

**St. Annibale Maria Di Francia  
and Luisa Piccarreta**

*A Wise Guide,  
an Obedient Disciple  
in the Spirituality of the Divine Will*





**FR. ANGELO SARDONE, RCJ**

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AND  
LUISA PICCARRETA**

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## PREFACE

Our diocese has also been blessed by the presence and work of St. Annibale Maria Di Francia who, since 1910, with the opening of a Girls' Orphanage in Palazzo Carcano, near the Cathedral of Trani, introduced his spirituality based on prayer for vocations and charity towards the little ones and the poor. Even today, his spiritual children, the Rogationists of the Heart of Jesus and the religious Sisters under the name 'Daughters of Divine Zeal, continue his mission in the archdiocese with various charitable and pastoral activities.

From the very beginning, the holy canon from Messina expressed a singular attention to the Servant of God, Luisa Piccarreta, who was already called 'Luisa the Saint' in Corato, the city where she was born, lived and died. He began to visit her almost immediately, attracted by the unique spirituality of the Divine Will, through reading the diaries in which, since 1899, by express order of her ordinary confessor, she transcribed her intense mystical relationships with Jesus and what He communicated to her.

St. Annibale, who was well acquainted with literature and mystical experience from the works of St. John of the Cross, whose name he had taken when he became a *Carmelite Tertiary* on 30 August 1889, was strongly fascinated by the spirituality of the Divine Will and became involved in it, devoting himself passionately and zealously to it until the end of his life. Evidence of this is preserved in a large collection of letters between the two, the memory of frequent visits to his home in Corato, and the sharing of moments of intense spirituality. St. Annibale's specific interest was further

confirmed by the appointment that the archbishop of the time, Monsignor Giuseppe Leo, conferred on him as *ecclesiastical censor for the press of his three dioceses*, thus giving him authorisation to *publish to the world the books dictated by Our Lord on the Divine Will*. His *Nulla Osta* was followed by the bishop's *Imprimatur* on the first 18 notebooks of the *Luisa Piccarreta Diary*. Unfortunately, the work was interrupted by the death of St. Annibale on 1 June 1927.

Already directly interested by the holy Founder, the Rogationist Servant of God, Fr. Pantaleone Palma, later took charge of it. Giving substance to St. Annibale's desire, he provided for the construction in Corato of an institute for the Sisters of Divine Zeal, called the «House of the Divine Will», where Luisa lived for 10 years. After him, although indirectly, Fr. Teodoro Tusino, Fr. Serafino Santoro and Fr. Vincenzo Santarella, a native of Corato, took an interest in Luisa Piccarreta, especially in reference to the events surrounding Fr. Palma. For about thirty years, another Rogationist, *Fr. Angelo Sardone*, historian of the Congregation, former Postulator General of the Rogationists and expert on the holy Founder, has been interested in the Di Francia - Luisa Piccarreta fellowship through historical research, participation in study conferences, various lectures, historical-scientific interventions and publications.

This contribution is part of a special series he has started, which outlines St. Annibale's relationship with the «Pious Souls » and is a handy scientific tool for promoting knowledge of these two souls of God, «Children of the Divine Will».

They, who supported each other in life in receiving and developing the project of spreading the spirituality of the Divine Will, continue today from heaven to satisfy a surprising and widespread desire for knowledge and reading of the writings of the mystic from Corato, which interests thousands and thousands of people all over the world.

While I thank Fr. Angelo Sardone for this interesting and valuable work, I hope that it will stimulate those who read it to get to know the Servant of God Luisa Piccarreta through the lens of balance, prudence and holiness of Annibale Maria Di Francia.

Trani, 16 December 2025

✠ Leonardo D'Ascenzo

*Archbishop*

*+ Leonardo D'Ascenzo*

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\* ASSOCIAZIONE LUISA PICCARRETA (a cura di), *Chiesa nel Divin Volere. A 150 anni dalla nascita di Luisa Piccarreta*, Atti del IV Convegno Internazionale, Corato, 23-26 aprile 2015, Rotas, Barletta 2017, 264 pp. My contribution, *Il centenario dell'Orologio*, is included in S. ANNIBALE M. DI FRANCIA, *Luisa Piccarreta e l'Orologio*, pp. 45-85.

\* LUISA PICCARRETA, *Diario* - 36 manuscript volumes (1899-1938). The originals, volumes 1 through 34, are in the possession of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Certified photographic and photostat copies are in the possession of the Archdiocese of Trani, along with volumes 35 and 36.



**The Hours of the Passion Clock in the crypt of Santa Maria Greca in**





## 1. INTRODUCTION

The life and path to sanctification of Annibale Maria Di Francia are accompanied by a profound desire to *be in the will of God the Father*, to fulfil it within the spiritual dynamic of his relationship as *a son*. *Being in God's will* means having the guarantee of serenity and peace, placing oneself in the palm of God who defends and nourishes, preserves from evil and gives full meaning to existence.

*God's will* and *personal sanctification* are an essential twofold reality, from which springs trusting obedience to the Father's plan, who wants him to be not only a priest, founder,

apostle of prayer for vocations, father of orphans and the poor, but above all *a saint*.

The guiding principle of his life is the maxim of St Paul, which expressly points to sanctification *as God's will* (1 *Thessalonians* 4:3). But it is also his in-depth reading of ascetic books, the eloquent witness of men and women of virtue, especially mystics, and the practice of a priestly and religious spirituality of great value that set him on with confidence upon the path of holiness.

The life of Annibale M. Di Francia is marked by significant human and spiritual experiences: he loses his father at an early age; he understands the importance of prayer for vocations during continuous

Eucharistic adoration; he encounters a blind man who introduces him into the notorious Avignone District of Messina; he establishes his charitable works, not without difficulty; he founds the Congregations of the Rogationists and the Daughters of Divine Zeal. Numerous pastoral, ecclesial, environmental and relational vicissitudes, for better or for worse, lead him to discern faithfully the will of God and induce him to conform himself to it with joy, conscious that this is the path to *great sanctification*.

Within this dynamic of high spiritual value is framed his encounter with the Servant of God Luisa Piccarreta, the mystic from Corato (Bari), with whom, for the rest of his life, he would maintain a holy friendship, consolidated day after day by mutual support and holy emulation, on the common path of the *Divine Will*.



## 2. TWO LIVES FOR A GREAT MISSION

The friendship of Annibale Di Francia with Luisa Piccarreta takes shape in a relationship built on intense conversations and spiritual verification, with a common desire to live and to make known to all the *will of God as an authentic spirituality*. Di Francia perceives in Luisa, with her intense spiritual life punctuated by prayer, manual labour, the Eucharist and daily conversations with Jesus, the providential instrument that would further reveal to him the truth and mystery of God's will. What he had been trying to achieve for some time, especially in prayer and in trusting abandonment to God amid the trials of his life, he sees as if by enchantment, accomplished and witnessed in an extraordinary way by a humble creature, powerless in her legs but vigorous and active in her mind and heart, strong in faith, sustained and enlightened by the words that Jesus communicates to her every day in their nightly conversations.

## 3. ANNIBALE MARIA DI FRANCIA

He was born in Messina on 5 July 1851, the third of four children of a noble and wealthy family, and there he died on 1 June 1927. He is known as *the distinguished Apostle of prayer for vocations and Father of orphans and the poor*. Ordained a priest in 1878, he settled in the Avignone Quarter of Messina, a place of moral and material misery inhabited by about 200 poor people. He began his work of relief and education for children and young people, both male and female, founding the Antonian Orphanages (1882-1883) and the religious Congregations of the Daughters of Divine Zeal (1887) and of the Rogationists (1897), which express, through a fourth

religious vow, the commitment to pray for vocations and to work in charitable activities, especially for the little ones and the poor.

One of the components that characterises his rich and varied personality is mysticism: a profound experience of love for the Lord and a marked attentiveness to this spiritual phenomenon and its renowned protagonists. His spiritual formation, especially in his youth, through reading, ascetical practice, and an almost natural attraction to mysticism, led him to cultivate contacts with various souls experienced in more intimate relationships of love with Jesus. One of these was Luisa Piccarreta. He was so fascinated by the spirituality of this humble believer that he felt himself to be «nothing before the great mercy of the Lord and the great deposit of the Revelations of the Divine Will»<sup>1</sup>. His interest in the Divine Will reveals itself as entirely providential, so that this doctrine may be known and spread, together with the human instrument of which Jesus makes use.



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<sup>1</sup> See ANNIBALE MARIA DI FRANCIA, *Letter to Luisa*, Messina, 23 February 1927, reported in *Raccolta di lettere inviate dal Beato Padre Annibale Maria Di Francia alla serva di Dio Luisa Piccarreta*, (here in after *Raccolta*), edited by the Postulation of the Cause for Beatification of Luisa Piccarreta, Corato 1997, p. 49.



#### 4. LUISA PICCARRETA

She was born in Corato (Bari) on Sunday, 23 April 1865, the fifth of eight sisters, to Vito Nicola and Rosa Tarantino, and is baptised that same evening. She attended the first elementary classes with the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception in Ivrea, where she also learns to work with the Tombolo (lace pillow). After receiving her first Communion, she begins to live an intense relationship with God through prayer and the Eucharist. One day, a sharp pain in her chest, with the danger of fainting, forces her to lean out of the window of her house and call for help. She has a vision: on the street she sees Jesus with his face covered in blood, who lifts his gaze toward her almost as if imploring aid. She is only 13 years old and wants to take upon herself those pains and sufferings. Something similar repeats itself at 17, when, on the farm in *Torre Disperata*, on the Murge plateau, where her family moves in the summer and where her father is a tenant farmer responsible for the land of a wealthy owner, she remained completely rigid, as if petrified. It is necessary to resort to the blessing of a priest for her to recover. With a formal rite in the crypt of the parish church of S. Maria Greca, she enters the Dominican Third Order, receives the scapular and takes the name of *Sister Maddalena*. From 1887, with the permission of her confessor, she agrees to remain completely bedridden, offering herself as a «voluntary victim».

As often happens in mystical experiences with people particularly marked by the love of God, something not easily understood, the Lord proposes to her and accomplishes with her a mystical marriage on three occasions: on 21 October 1888, when she receives a ring from Jesus; on 7 September 1890, and on 14 September 1894, when she receives the invisible stigmata. The ecstasies and intense conversations with Jesus begin. From 1898, she is granted the privilege of participating in Holy Mass, first weekly, then daily, in her room, which becomes like a chapel. Authorised priests alternate, and among them, in particular Don Gennaro De Gennaro (1844-1922), her confessor, who commands her to transcribe everything that occurs during her nocturnal ecstasies. On 28 February 1899, Luisa, in perfect obedience to her confessor, begins to write her *Diary*, whose composition continues until 28 December 1938, and produces a full 36 volumes. Seated on her bed, a position she would maintain even after her death, gazing at the crucifix, illiterate as she is, she transcribes the lofty concepts that the Lord reveals to her about the *Divine Will*.





## 5. THE PROVIDENTIAL ENCOUNTER

The earthquake that shook the city of Messina and the Strait of Sicily on 28 December 1908, causing over 80,000 deaths, led St. Annibale to transfer his orphans, boys and girls, from Messina to the towns of Francavilla Fontana and Oria

(Brindisi), where he was welcomed by the local bishop, Monsignor Antonio Di Tommaso (1860-1956). Here he began his work for boys and girls, in particular the school of arts and trades.

On 2 April 1910, welcomed in Trani by Archbishop Monsignor Francesco Paolo Carrano (1841-1915), in the Carcano Palace, near the cathedral, he inaugurated the Casa delle Figlie del Divino Zelo (House of the Daughters of Divine Zeal), an orphanage for girls<sup>2</sup>.

Thus begins the presence of St. Annibale Maria Di Francia also in the town of Corato, a few kilometres from Trani, and in the life of



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<sup>2</sup> See A. SARDONE, *Un monumento di carità, Trani 1910-2010*. The centenary of the presence of the Sisters Daughters of Divine Zeal in Trani, "Padre Annibale Oggi", no. 37 n. s. Supplement to "Adif", year XXVI, no. 4 (October-December) 2010, 48 pp.

Luisa Piccarreta. The fame of this humble woman, known even to Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, had awakened in him a profound desire to meet her. It is not known exactly when the first meeting took place. The documentary sources are the numerous letters of correspondence exchanged between the two souls (Luisa's first letter is dated 20 March 1911) and the archive material<sup>3</sup>. There were frequent visits to her house, where he celebrated the Eucharist, stopped to pray and talk with Luisa, corrected her writings, directed her spiritually and came to feel almost as duty to transmit and spread the ideal of *the Divine Will*. Involved in these relationships of holy and profound friendship were her sister, Angelina, her friends, nephews



and nieces<sup>4</sup>, the Cimadomo sisters<sup>5</sup>, Arcangela, Filomena and Giuseppina, her regular confessors Don Gennaro De Gennaro (1886-1968) and Don Benedetto Calvi (1886-1958). The revelations of Jesus and the writings on *the Divine Will* were the constant object of his meditation<sup>6</sup>. Especially in the last months of his life, when pleurisy gave him no respite, he felt a very strong closeness to Luisa's sufferings: «I suffer very anguished nights and

#### **Don Benedetto Calvi**

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<sup>3</sup> See DI FRANCIA, *Scritti* 40, pp. 1-82, in Archive of the General Postulation of the Rogationists (APR), Rome.

<sup>4</sup> LUISA PICCARRETA (*here in after* PICCARRETA), *Letter to Fr. Annibale M. Di Francia*, Corato, 3 September 1916, in APR.

<sup>5</sup> They donated land to build the House of the Daughters of Divine Zeal in Corato. See PICCARRETA, *Letter to Fr. Annibale*, Messina, 8 January 1927, reported in *Raccolta*, p. 41.

<sup>6</sup> DI FRANCIA, *Letter to Luisa*, Messina, 20 June 1924, in *Raccolta*, p. 13.

you who are with Jesus at night, remember me who spend them in agony...»<sup>7</sup>. Luisa had in fact offered to share his night-time sufferings<sup>8</sup>, and had confided in him about very important matters concerning her spiritual life, such as the gift of miracles offered by Jesus and refused by her<sup>9</sup>. Their epistolary correspondence became very intense up to the eve of his death.

## 6. THE EPISTOLARY CORRESPONDENCE

Shortly after meeting Luisa, St. Annibale became her extraordinary confessor. He gradually learned from her and savoured the content of her mystical writings and the unique aspects of her charism and mission. Thus, between the two souls there developed a dense epistolary correspondence which highlights significant traits of the personality of both and sheds brilliant light for understanding the mystery of *the Divine Will*.

In the Archive of the General Postulation of the Rogationists in Rome are preserved 70 letters and 7 postcards sent by Luisa Piccarreta to St. Annibale beginning in 1911: the first letter is dated 20 March 1911, the last 25 May 1927, six days before the death of St. Annibale. To these must be added a telegram sent by her on 1 June 1927 upon his death.

Volumes 40 (*Luisa Piccarreta*) and 56 (*Circolari, Lettere varie*) of the *Scritti* of St. Annibale, presented at the time for the start of the Diocesan Process of Beatification and Canonisation, contain various material which

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<sup>7</sup> ID., *Letter to Luisa*, Messina, 8 March 1927, in *Raccolta*, p. 59.

<sup>8</sup> Di Francia mentions this in his letter to her sent from Messina on 24 March 1927, in *Raccolta*, p. 64.

<sup>9</sup> DI FRANCIA, *Letter to Luisa*, Messina, 17 April 1927, in *Raccolta*, p. 66.

in 1945 were in the possession of the General Postulation of the Rogationists. A more accurate research conducted later, also by the Rogationists, by archivist Fr. Salvatore Greco and Fr. Ciro Quaranta, former General Postulator of the Rogationists, in collaboration with the Postulation of the Cause for Beatification of Luisa Piccarreta, which in 1997 had published 21 letters of St. Annibale to Luisa Piccarreta<sup>10</sup>, brought to light a total of 33 letters from the holy Founder to the Apulian mystic. The first is dated 19 November 1920, sent from Messina. The last is dated 15 May 1927, sent from Contrada Guardia (Messina) 16 days before his death<sup>11</sup>. Considering those written by Luisa Piccarreta, there are certainly many more than those discovered.

A scientific and documented analysis of the epistolary exchange of St. Annibale with Luisa Piccarreta will further highlight the many aspects of their personalities and their common intent to propagate the charism of *the Divine Will*, in which the saint from Messina felt profoundly involved, to the point of becoming *its apostle*.

Luisa's trust in St. Annibale is blind: she leaves it up to him the decision whether or not to print each manuscript, and she does hesitate to prescribe to him: «if you see that they are nonsense and that they can do no good to souls, tear them up and burn them»<sup>12</sup>. She writes to him in this way: «Do whatever you think, I give you complete freedom. You know and

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<sup>10</sup> The *Raccolta* consists of 72 pp.

<sup>11</sup> See CIRO QUARANTA (ed.), *Epistolario di S. Annibale M. Di Francia*, V, years 1922-1927, *Pro manuscripto*.

<sup>12</sup> PICCARRETA, *Letter to Fr. Annibale*, Corato, 9 June 1917, in APR.

must understand that these are the things of a poor, ignorant woman and that if there is any good, it is all from Jesus. Therefore, they need to be reviewed with accuracy»<sup>13</sup>. At the same time, she asked him to keep her writings confidential and not to show them to anyone, not from lack of trust in him, but because of the sensitive nature of their content: «Your distance and the fear that other people might read them is what makes me reticent. And then there are so many of my foolish things, things concerning many chastisements and priests, therefore exposing them to others causes me great pain. I wrote them only out of obedience and for no other reason»<sup>14</sup>; «I always recommend secrecy; they are always intimate things and only Divine Will could induce me to make the sacrifice»<sup>15</sup>.

St. Annibale is fully aware of all this. In a communication, repeating Luisa's instructions almost word for word, he confirms: «It is an indispensable work. There are points which, however true and holy, when viewed with the spirit and with holy simplicity, would nevertheless conflict with prudence if published, and would draw the criticism of the ecclesiastical Authority, which would react to the detriment of the entire Work. There are certain chapters that must be deferred until you are in

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<sup>13</sup> ID., *Letter to Fr. Annibale Corato*, 9 February 1920, in APR.

<sup>14</sup> ID., *Letter to Fr. Annibale, Corato*, 17 July 1921, in APR. He shows similar concern in his letter of 26 March 1922, inviting St. Annibale, on his return to Puglia, to bring him a manuscript he has with him: *you will do me a favour by removing a worry from my mind and allowing me to rest in peace.*

<sup>15</sup> ID., *Letter to Fr. Annibale, Corato*, 27 December 1923, in APR.

heaven»<sup>16</sup>. And he continues: «I meditate, that is, I read two or three chapters of your writings in the Divine Will at a time and with reflection, and the impressions I draw from them are intimate and profound! I see in them a sublime and divine science, although I do not yet comprehend it fully, given the limitation of my intelligence. These writings must now be made known to the world. I believe they will procure great good. As sublime as this science of the Divine Will is, so these writings, of a heavenly dictation, present it clearly and limpidly. But, in my opinion, no human mind could have formed them. ... However, I always insist on one point, that holiness does not consist in a formula. In order that this new science may form saints who surpass those of the past, the new saints must also have all the virtues of the ancient saints in a heroic degree...»<sup>17</sup>. «I am reading your writings, they are always sublime revelations, comparisons worthy of the divine Creator»<sup>18</sup>.

«Lady Obedience imposes on you that you write down, day or night, everything, everything, everything that the Lord reveals to you: nothing must be omitted. It is the word of Uncreated Wisdom, and one word is worth more than the whole Universe»<sup>19</sup>.

«I thank you for the words you have reported to me about the divine task that Our Lord, in His Infinite Goodness, has deigned to give to me, poor as I am, and to mine, to publish the wonders of His Divine Will.

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<sup>16</sup> DI FRANCIA, *Letter to Luisa*, Messina, 23 February 1927, in *Raccolta*, p. 54.

<sup>17</sup> ID., *Letter to Luisa*, Messina, 20 June 1924, in *Raccolta*, p. 14.

<sup>18</sup> ID., *Letter to Luisa*, Messina, 12 July 1926, in *Raccolta*, p. 15.

<sup>19</sup> ID., *Letter to Luisa*, Rome, 4 September 1926, in *Raccolta*, p. 21.

In this way Our Lord shows that everything is His work. ... I wish to let you know, for your peace of mind, that in all these publications, as long as you are alive, may Our Lord grant you many long years, your name will not appear at all except as *the authoress of Orologio della Passione e di Anima solitaria*, and not even your native town. ... From your chapters, I learn even more about your ineffable and continual sufferings due to the privations of Beloved Jesus; this moves me greatly and compels me to pray to Jesus that He may interrupt these tremendous privations and console you with His Divine Presence more often and for longer»<sup>20</sup>.

And again: «Do not preoccupy yourself about your manuscripts, in case the Lord calls me to Himself, because since you are alive, they would be entrusted to you, or the Lord would appoint someone to continue this printing. And if you were in Heaven, together with me, we would discuss it with our Lord, Beloved Jesus. In any case, it seems to me that we should not worry about this. The manuscripts are kept in a little cabinet, and in essence they are neither mine nor yours, nor anyone else's, but they belong to Jesus, *Libri di Cielo*, in English known as *Book of Heaven*, as He Himself has entitled them, and He Himself knows what to do with them»<sup>21</sup>.

«I have written to you to make you feel at ease, although you are always so, by the grace of the Lord, as the Firstborn Daughter of the Divine Will. Unworthily I pray for you, that our Lord may not make you suffer much in finding Him, and that He may always be near you to comfort and sustain you in the hard pilgrimage of life, until He introduces you into His

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<sup>20</sup> ID., *Letter to Luisa*, Messina, 23 November 1926, in *Raccolta*, p. 37.

<sup>21</sup> ID., *Letter to Luisa*, Messina, 14 February 1927, in *Raccolta*, pp. 43-49.

heavenly glory. The Lord has given us all the writings, that is, the great deposit of his divine revelations, into our custody, and special guidance on how to regulate their publication, which before long you will see with the first booklet that is being printed in Oria, both for the great means and machines that are needed, and the labour, and of all this the Lord has given and continues to give us a singular abundance»<sup>22</sup>.

### 7. ST. ANNIBALE, ECCLESIASTICAL EXAMINER

Archbishop Giuseppe Maria Leo<sup>23</sup> was aware of the uniqueness of the writings of Luisa Piccarreta and, at the same time, was concerned about the questions and suspicions that they might raise and the difficulties they would encounter, especially in ecclesiastical circles. For this reason, once he had come to know more closely and deeply the moral stature, competence and guarantee in matters of faith and theology of the canon from Messina who had providentially been found



S. E. Mons. Arcivescovo Giuseppe M. Leo

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<sup>22</sup> ID., *Letter to Luisa*, Messina, 4 March 1927, in *Raccolta*, p. 56.

<sup>23</sup> He was born on 25 March 1864 in Andria and ordained a priest on 19 September 1887. Renowned for his remarkable virtues of mind and heart, he held important positions, including canon of the Cathedral and rector of the Diocesan Seminary of Andria. Appointed first bishop of Nicotera and Tropea on 23 June 1909, he was transferred to Trani on 17 January 1920. He died on 20 January 1939, at the age of 74, while still fully active.

working alongside Luisa Piccarreta, in early August 1926, by regular decree, he appointed St. Annibale M. Di Francia *as Ecclesiastical Examiner for the printing of works in his three dioceses of Trani, Barletta and Bisceglie*. In practice, as Di Francia himself confirmed to Luisa, he conferred on him «jurisdiction over you with regard to your writings and their publication, that is, to handle you and arrange for said publication, as I believe is just (his words). And this he began to do without even examining a single volume!»<sup>24</sup>.

In his letter to Fr. Francesco Vitale<sup>25</sup> in which he communicated his appointment, St. Annibale commented: «It was a miracle worked by Our Lord to enable me to place *Nihil Obstat* on the publication of Luisa's many volumes on the Divine Will, and He will grant *the Imprimatur!*»<sup>26</sup>. On Tuesday, 10 August 1926, he was in Corato in the home of Luisa Piccarreta, to discuss with her *the publication of the Rivelazioni*<sup>27</sup>.

The concern to remain faithful to the task entrusted to him kept him firmly vigilant until the end of his life, almost distracting him from his commitments and responsibilities as founder: "Know that I hardly concerns

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<sup>24</sup> DI FRANCIA, *Letter to Luisa*, Messina, 15 October 1926, in *Raccolta*, p. 24.

<sup>25</sup> For further information, see "Luci sul sentiero rogazionista", 1, I confratelli defunti (1908-1992), Rome 1993, pp. 199-235. See also the contribution by A. SARDONE, *P. Francesco Bonaventura Vitale nella Storia rogazionista*, in ANGELO SINDONI (ed.), *Francesco Bonaventura Vitale e i Rogazionisti nel Mezzogiorno d'Italia*, Rubettino, Soveria Mannelli 2004, pp. 47-70.

<sup>26</sup> DI FRANCIA, *Letter to Fr. Francesco Bonaventura Vitale*, Trani, 6 August 1926, in DI FRANCIA, *Scritti*, 33, p. 115.

<sup>27</sup> ID., *Note in Scritti*, 40, doc. 5689.

myself any longer with other matters of my institutes, since I have dedicated myself entirely to the great work of the Divine Will. I talk about it with spiritual persons, I converse on this subject with whomever I can, I promote it as much as possible, even in my institutes”, he wrote to Luisa Piccarreta<sup>28</sup>.

There was an urgent need to communicate the corrections he was gradually making in the notebooks of her writings, subjected to scrupulous reading and approval, and to begin printing them in his Antonian press in Oria, for which he had ordered the purchase of a completely new set of typefaces. He felt all this was urgent, perhaps aware that he would not be able to complete the delicate work. In fact, the publication would remain only just begun due to his death.

The internal affairs of the Rogationist Institute, grappling with problems of organisation of activities and religious personnel, the urgency of other needs more pressing than the publication of notebooks with spiritual material not easily understood, and, above all, the absence of a man of the calibre of the Founder, who had completely



**Fr. Pantaleone Palma**

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<sup>28</sup> ID., *Letter to Luisa*, Messina, 14 February 1927, in *Raccolta*, p. 47.

immersed himself in the spirituality of *the Divine Will*, after his death, except for the noble and intelligent figure of Fr. Pantaleone Palma<sup>29</sup>, would cause a cooling of interest on the part of the Congregation of the Rogationists and the Daughters of Divine Zeal in their relations with Luisa Piccarreta and her spirituality.

## 8. THE WRITINGS OF LUISA PICCARRETA

Despite her repugnance, but only in perfect obedience to her spiritual directors, Luisa Piccarreta left behind a substantial *literary corpus*, starting with her first work, «L’Orologio della Passione», published several times, the 36 volumes of the Diario, and other shorter works.

### 8.1. L’OROLOGIO DELLA PASSIONE

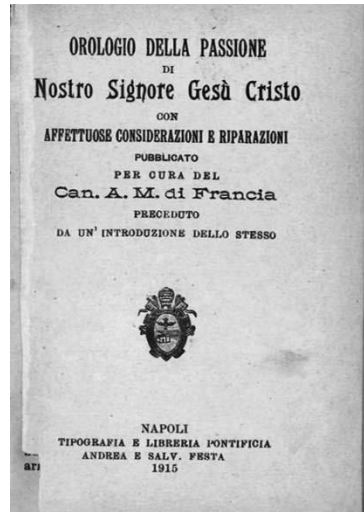
St. Annibale M. Di Francia was deeply drawn to the mystery of the cross and the crucifix. The Passion of the Lord was not only the object of his daily meditation, but also of his preaching and rigorous penitential practice<sup>30</sup>. Is famous a passage from a homily delivered in Trani on 16 April

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<sup>29</sup> He was born in Ceglie Messapica (Brindisi) on 15 April 1875. In 1902, in Messina, where he had gone to complete his university studies, he met St. Hannibal in the Avignone district, where he was hosted by him. In 1904, he became a Rogationist, St. Hannibal's first and principal collaborator. He died in Rome, at the Holy Stairs, on 2 September 1935. In 2021, the diocesan inquiry for his beatification was initiated.

<sup>30</sup> Fr. Francesco Bonaventura Vitale, his first biographer, recounts that "Archbishop Guarino, when surrounded by pilgrims who asked him for his blessing before leaving for Rome to visit Pope Leo XIII, pointed to the Father's emaciated figure and said to

1912, in which he traces, with highly inspired tones, the meaning of the mystery of the cross and of Jesus crucified: «There is a book, my faithful, in which the learned and the ignorant, the great and the small, the righteous and the sinners can read and learn. It is a book open to all, in which everyone can learn the most sublime theology of the attributes of God, his power, his mercy, his justice, his charity; a book in which, in characters of blood, but not earthly blood, the mystery of God's eternal love for mankind is written and explained. This book is such a school of wisdom and divine science that in it the greatest saints of the Church have been formed, and without this book it is impossible to understand and practise any virtue. All the doctrines of the Gospel are summarised and illustrated in this book: all the books of Sacred Scripture, from the Pentateuch of Moses to the Apocalypse of St John, are but pages of this book; all the voluminous works of the Fathers of the Church, of the doctors, of the sacred ministers' teachers of the peoples, have their origin in these pages, and are nothing more than the phrases of this book, set forth, illustrated and commented upon. This book has formed the



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them, I commend this Crucified One to you". See F. VITALE, *Il canonico Annibale Maria Di Francia nella vita e nelle opere*, Messina 1939, p. 120.

saints... What is this book of all sciences and wisdom that is in heaven and on earth? It is the Crucified One, Jesus Christ nailed to the cross!»<sup>31</sup>.

Spirituality regarding the Passion of Jesus Christ was certainly shaped within a devotional context marked by the writings of St. Alphonsus M. de' Liguori (1696-1787): *La Coronella delle sante piaghe* (Naples, 1737), some short devotional songs that became part of the common repertoire (*Gesù mio, con dure funi, O fieri flagelli*), the text *Gradi della Passione* (1768) and in particular *L'Amore delle anime, i.e. Riflessioni ed Affetti sulla Passione di Gesù Cristo. Da meditarsi avanti al SS. Sacramento* (1751), the major work that contained *L'Orologio della Passione*, a literary genre already in use for a long time, as attested by some publications from the 1600s<sup>32</sup>. The book was very successful in its day, with more than 30 editions published during the saint's lifetime, including four in German.

St. Annibale was familiar with an analogous text by the Capuchin Father Simone of Naples, *Horologio della Passione di Giesù Cristo secondo le 24 hore nelle quali la patì. Distinto in discorsi istorici, discorsi riflessivi ed affetti meditativi*, which, according to authoritative Alphonsian scholars, would be a “probable source” of St. Alphonsus' various writings and reflections on

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<sup>31</sup> DI FRANCIA, *Scritti*, 13, doc. 1981.

<sup>32</sup> St. Alphonsus's writings on the theme of the Passion are very extensive. In almost all his works, especially those for meditation and preaching, there are many pages on the Passion of Christ using various traditional literary genres. Everything was transformed into meditation by his personal spiritual experience: lived firsthand and then proposed to others. See LONDOÑO N. CSSR, *Se entregò por nosotros. Teología de la Pasión en San Alfonso de Liguori*.

the Passion and certainly of the Orologio itself<sup>33</sup>. The second volume of the *Horologio*, 488 pages long, published in Naples by Domenico Roselli's press in the Rogationist Library in Oria (Brindisi)<sup>34</sup>.

This significant ascetic inclination found fertile ground for sharing and high spirituality with Luisa Piccarreta. Convinced of her value, usefulness and mystical experience, especially in reference to the sufferings of Christ, and drawn by the desire to learn precious things from her daily mystical conversations with Jesus, St. Annibale invited her to write a text of meditation on *the 24 hours of the Passion of Jesus Christ*.

Luisa obediently set to work and between 1913 and 1914, she wrote a text. The following year, in 1915, St. Annibale, with the Tipografia e Libreria Pontificia di Andrea e Salvatore Festa of Naples, published it in 136 pages with the full title «*Orologio della Passione di Nostro Signore Gesù Cristo con affettuose considerazioni e riparazioni pubblicato per cura del Can.co A. M. Di Francia da Messina e preceduto da una Introduzione dello stesso*». This publication was followed by the "Trattato sulla Divina Volontà", mentioned in the 1921 edition.

St. Annibale edited the first four editions, two in 1915, one in 1917 and the last in 1925<sup>35</sup> affixing the *Nulla Osta* with the regular *Imprimatur*<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup> See O. GREGORIO, G. CACCIATORE, D. CAPONE (eds.) S. ALFONSO MARIA DE' LIGUORI, *Opere ascetiche. Introduzione generale*, Edizioni di storia e letteratura, Rome 1960, p. 205.

<sup>34</sup> See S. GRECO, *La biblioteca di Padre Annibale*, in *Studi Rogazionisti*, no. 24, year X (January-March) 1989, p. 71 ff.

At the release of the first edition, the blessing of God seemed evident. In a short time, the 5,000 printed copies were exhausted, without being sent to specific addresses; it was enough to send one to a devout person for requests to begin arriving. Cardinal Francesco di Paola Cassetta, Prefect of the Congregation of the Council, appreciated the book and requested 50 copies at once<sup>37</sup>.

With a special circular letter and by sending a complimentary copy, St. Annibale informed the bishops, describing the pages of the Orologio as "inspired and apt to produce the most vivid impressions of tender and affectionate love towards our adorable Redeemer Jesus Christ" and asking that the pious exercise be introduced in some Monastery or among some devout persons of the Diocese<sup>38</sup>.

Knowledge of the volume was also promoted and disseminated through the Antonian periodical of Di Francia's charitable and charismatic

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<sup>35</sup> See DI FRANCIA, *Libro dei Divini Benefici, Anno 1925*: "Pubblicazione Orologio della Passione quarta edizione edita dalla nostra Tipografia femminile", in *Scritti*, 61, doc. 2180.

<sup>36</sup> See CONGREGATIO PRO CAUSIS SANCTORUM, *Canonizationis servi Dei Hannibalis Mariae Di Francia, Positio super Virtutibus*, 1988, II, p. 713.

<sup>37</sup> Francesco di Paola Cassetta (Rome, 12 August 1841 – Rome, 23 March 1919). Leo XIII appointed him bishop and later, on 29 November 1895, cardinal. As bishop, he ordained Eugenio Pacelli, the future Pope Pius XII, as a priest. On 3 January 1914, he took up the position of librarian of the Holy Roman Church. Shortly thereafter, on 14 February of the same year, he was appointed prefect of the Sacred Congregation of the Council, now the Congregation for the Clergy.

<sup>38</sup> DI FRANCIA, *Scritti*, 56, doc. 3975.

works, «Dio e il Prossimo»<sup>39</sup> in which he himself wrote the short articles. In the July 1916 issue, *L'Orologio* was widely presented in the section “*Rivista Bibliografica*” and defined as *Un libro d'oro per tempi attuali*.

The second edition, also published in 1915, was enlarged to 272 pages, at the price of one lira. It could be requested directly from Canon Di Francia or from the Superior of the Orfanelle di S. Antonio, Via Duomo 37, in Trani (Bari). In the following issue of October 1916, a special *Notice* informed readers that «following the announcement, the book was quickly snapped up until the exhaustion of the second edition. The publication of the third edition, more complete, corrected, and printed in greater numbers, is soon announced»<sup>40</sup>.

This impressive phenomenon of diffusion was well known also to Luisa, who repeatedly urged St Annibale to print further editions, to meet the continuous requests that came directly to her, leaving her completely

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<sup>39</sup> See "Dio e il Prossimo", Monthly Bulletin of the Pious Institutes of the Evangelical Rogation of the Heart of Jesus and the Daughters of Divine Zeal with attached Antoniani Orphanages of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, Messina, July 1916, year IX, no. 7, p. 4. The bulletin was launched with a trial issue on 15 August 1907 and began regular publication on 26 June 1908. See A. SARDONE, "Dio e il Prossimo": un progetto di evangelizzazione rogazionista, in "Studi Rogazionisti", no. 94 (July-September) 2007, pp. 181-203.

<sup>40</sup> See "Dio e il Prossimo," October 1916, year IX, no. 10, p. 4. The third edition was commissioned by Fr. Annibale on 16 October 1916 for a total of 5,000 copies at a price of 2,000 lire, with an advance payment of 600 lire. See *Nota di Salvatore Festa*, in APR.

embarrassed<sup>41</sup>. In her letter of 23 June 1915, Luisa warned St. Annibale that «Jesus longs that there be at least one soul in every town who would make these Hours»<sup>42</sup>. With a postcard on 10 July 1915, she further informs him that 60 copies of the Orologio were exhausted in less than 24 hours, at the price of one lira.

The popularity of the Orologio led St. Annibale to consider printing a third edition at the same D'Auria press in Naples. Luisa suggested instead that he print it at his own press in Oria because «under his immediate supervision, the work could be more accurate and elegant»<sup>43</sup>. In the third edition, Luisa added some «*Pratiche*» that follow the meditation of the individual hours, highlighting particular Christian virtues.

The fourth edition, on which St. Annibale had already begun to work as early as 1921<sup>44</sup> with further corrections and additions, was printed in Messina in 15,000 copies at the press of the Daughters of Divine Zeal in 1925<sup>45</sup>. He was preparing another edition in 1927 but was unable to complete it due to illness and death.

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<sup>41</sup> A priest from Cerignola requests 10 copies. Another from Molfetta has already paid in advance for 10 copies. Yet another has requested as many as he can get. See PICCARRETA, *Letter to Fr. Annibale*, Corato, 18 August 1915, in APR. For the first two editions, 10,000 copies were printed.

<sup>42</sup> PICCARRETA, *Letter to Fr. Annibale*, Corato, 23 June 1915, in, APR.

<sup>43</sup> ID., *Letter to Fr. Annibale*, Corato, 3 September 1916, in, APR.

<sup>44</sup> See the title page in DI FRANCIA, *Scritti*, 49. The place of printing is Messina and the printer is Can.co A. M. Di Francia.

<sup>45</sup> See DI FRANCIA, *Orologio della Passione*, in *Scritti*, 40, doc. 5695.



Fr. Serafino Santoro, one of the first disciples of St. Annibale's, author of the «*Memorie Storiche*» gathered from the words of the founder around 1925 and of a *Brief historical profile of the Rogationist Congregation*, testifies that St. Annibale, «desired good health in order to accomplish that work, which he considered entrusted to him by Our Lord. But he was unable to accomplish it. ... Because of the esteem he had for those illustrations, he had the Sisters read and meditate on them. At the Holy Spirit [the monastery of that name, Motherhouse of the

Daughters of Divine Zeal], the morning meditation consisted of a passage from the Patimenti of Venerable Thomas, a passage from the revelations of Cecilia Baj, and a passage from Luisa Piccarreta's illustrations. Yet, he did not approve of everything and realized that there was more than just phrases and orthography to be corrected. Once he said to me: "You see, there are certain things in Luisa that cannot be allowed to pass. For example, where she writes that Our Lord, to indicate how much he loved her with preferential love, said to her: "You see, my daughter, while the Most Holy Mother is at my left, you are at my right." He explained to me how in mysticism such hyperbolic expressions are easily found, but they do not edify the faithful and must be corrected. He desired healing for this reason, because essentially those writings could do good»<sup>46</sup>.

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<sup>46</sup> S. SANTORO, *I miei ricordi sul Padre*, typescript, p. 62, in APR. For information on Santoro, see "Luci sul sentiero rogazionista," 1, *I confratelli defunti* (1908-1992), Rome 1993, pp. 301-344.

A decree of the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office on 13 July 1938 condemned three books of Luisa Piccarreta, the first of which was *L'Orologio della Passione di Nostro Signore Gesù Cristo con un Trattato sulla Divina Volontà*<sup>47</sup>. The motivation stated that «the principal subject of her writings is the Divine Will, conceived in an exaggerated and erroneous manner, and expressed in a language and terminology often redundant with inaccuracies and extravagances»<sup>48</sup>. It also spoke of an «alleged economic profit accruing to Luisa Piccarreta from the publications, and the question of the necessity of the priest to bring her out of *her usual state*, as well as of the *special and unique mission* of Luisa to make known the truths about *living in the Divine Will of Jesus* and *excessive mysticism*. As has been amply demonstrated in *the Positio* of St. Annibale, prepared during his canonisation process, this refers to the 5th edition of the volume, edited by Don Benedetto Calvi and published in Taranto in 1934<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> See “L'Osservatore Romano”, Sunday, 11 September 1938, no. 211, pp. 1-2.

<sup>48</sup> See *ibidem*.

<sup>49</sup> See *Positio Di Francia*, II, p. 714.



## 8.2. MEMOIRS OF CHILDHOOD

St. Annibale also required Luisa to write her biographical *Memorie*. He had already experienced this with another mystic, the visionary of La Salette, Melania Calvat<sup>50</sup>, during his stay in Messina for the organisational and spiritual restoration of the Congregation of the Daughters of Divine Zeal in 1897-1898. Calvat wrote 128 pages of her autobiography, which, however, stops at the 12th year of her life<sup>51</sup>.

He wrote to Luisa as follows:

«Continue that fifteenth in black where you began to write about what happened to you in your childhood and youth. Write everything...

Everything for Holy Obedience, great Lady, for the glory of God, for your mortification and for the good of souls. Take care not to tear out or hide anything!»<sup>52</sup>.

And again:

«Your Lady, who is Holy Obedience, wants you to write everything you remember about your childhood, infancy and youth, in relation to your holy

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<sup>50</sup> See A. SARDONE, *S. Annibale Maria Di Francia e Melania Calvat*, Memoria di forti vincoli di affetto e venerazione, Altamura 2024, 60 pp. Collana *Anime pie*, 1.

<sup>51</sup> This valuable document is preserved in the APR.

<sup>52</sup> DI FRANCIA, *Letter to Luisa*, Trani, 28 August 1926, in *Raccolta*, p. 26.

intimate commerce with your Divine Lover, up to the beginning of the illness that confines you to your bed...»<sup>53</sup>.

Luisa, once again obedient, began the drafting of the text, of which the printing was undertaken in Oria. At present there circulates the mimeographed *Quaderno di "Memorie dell'infanzia"*, s.d., 18 pp., bearing the date 15 July 1926.

### 8.3. THE VOLUMES OF THE DIVINE WILL

Even before receiving the formal appointment as ecclesiastical censor, St. Annibale had become deeply engaged with the reading of Luisa's works and with their literary and theological revision. Volume 40 of his *Scritti* gathers what pertains to his relations with Luisa Piccarreta. It includes for the most part notes for the publication of the Opere of the Divine Will, various writings, reflections, drafts, prefaces, protests of the compiler, distribution of the writings, etc. In one document are reported «The three names given by Our Lord Jesus Christ to the entire Work of the Divine Will: The Divine Kingdom in the midst of creatures. Book of Heaven. The Call of creatures to the Order as before original sin»<sup>54</sup>.

St. Annibale personally read and corrected most of the notebooks that Luisa sent him. For the copying, he made use of Sisters of the Sisters of Divine Zeal, of Sr. M. Cristina<sup>55</sup>, of a nun of St. Francis de Sales, earned and

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<sup>53</sup> ID., *Letter to Luisa*, Trani, 30 August 1926, in *Raccolta*, p. 18. See also LUISA PICCARRETA, *Diario*, vol. 20, 27 November 1926.

<sup>54</sup> DI FRANCIA, *Notes*, in *Scritti*, 40, doc. 5683

<sup>55</sup> ID., *Letter to Luisa*, Trani, 28 August 1926, in *Raccolta*, p. 16.

erudite, who had retired for reasons of health to the Sisters' House in Taormina<sup>56</sup>, and his secretary, Sr. M. Eucaristica Melita<sup>57</sup>. The revision of the proofs, instead, he entrusted to the Rogationist Religious. He had assured that, in the event of his death, they would continue the publication<sup>58</sup>.

St. Annibale's idea was to publish the `entire work of the Divine Will in Messina, where he could correct the proofs personally. However, since in Messina the work in the printing press was abundant, he transferred the entire task to Oria, to his Antonian press, where there were many «young printers who, with speed and great love, greatly appreciated the privilege granted by Our Lord to publish these writings»<sup>59</sup>. At the beginning of 1927, some sheets were already in print<sup>60</sup>: «those dear young

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<sup>56</sup> «The sister of a deceased bishop, she is an elderly woman and a true saint in her humility and charity. She is educated and erudite, knows French and music, and Italian very well ». See DI FRANCIA, *Letter to Luisa*, Messina, 23 February 1927, in *Raccolta*, p. 53.

<sup>57</sup> Sister Eucaristica Melita (Graniti, Me, 2 March 1901 – Messina, 3 March 1986). See «Profili delle Consorelle defunte», *Figlie del Divino Zelo* 1982-1992, 4, p. 92. *The Lord has given her the great grace of working with me in compiling and revising drafts, letters, recordings, keeping manuscripts in the archive, etc.* See DI FRANCIA, *Letter to Luisa*, Messina, 14 February 1927, in *Raccolta*, p. 48. Sister Eucaristica herself, especially in the last months of St. Annibale's life, in a P.S. to a letter from Di Francia, asks Luisa to inform the Mother General, Sr. Nazarena Maione, or her directly, if there is danger to his life. See DI FRANCIA, *Letter to Luisa*, Messina, 13 March 1927, in *Raccolta*, pp. 61-62.

<sup>58</sup> DI FRANCIA, *Letter to Luisa*, Messina, 8 March 1927, in *Raccolta*, p. 59.

<sup>59</sup> ID., *Letter to Luisa*, Messina, 23 November 1926, in *Raccolta*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>60</sup> ID., *Letter to Luisa*, Messina, 23 February 1927, in *Raccolta*, p. 50.

men of Oria, typographers, work with great affection and care, and I assure you that the edition presents itself very beautiful, and I hope soon to send you a sample»<sup>61</sup>.

The Lord himself, in a vision, had confirmed to Luisa the importance of St. Annibale's presence and of his editorial work: «Jesus made me see the Reverend Father and, standing near him, placed his holy right hand upon his head to infuse firmness, help and will, saying to him: “My son, make haste, do not lose time`, I will help you, I will be near you, so that everything goes well and according to my Will. How much it matters to Me that My Will be known, and as with paternal goodness I have dictated the writings concerning the kingdom of the Supreme Fiat, so I will assist the printing, I will be in the midst of those who will be occupied, so that everything may be regulated by Me. Therefore, quickly, quickly”»<sup>62</sup>.

The difficulties in carrying forward the work with alacrity were determined by the many pages to be read and corrected, by his precarious state of health and also by the diabolical assaults she underwent. «The infernal spirits would wish to disturb the great Work»<sup>63</sup>, he confides to Luisa. But there is more: «I will not tell you how I feel the devil tremble, or rather many devils, for which I often make adjurations to Satan in the name of Jesus. I tell you in the strictest secret that the devil, to overthrow me, took the form of a person known to us to bring me alarming news, by

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<sup>61</sup> ID., *Letter to Luisa*, Messina, 14 February 1927, in *Raccolta*, p. 48.

<sup>62</sup> PICCARRETA, *Diario*, vol. 20, 28 September 1926.

<sup>63</sup> DI FRANCIA, *Letter to Luisa*, Messina, 23 February 1927, in *Raccolta*, p. 52.

which I was seized with a palpitation that was about to kill me, but then the deception was discovered»<sup>64</sup>. «This is a publication for which hell trembles so much...»<sup>65</sup>. And again: «oh, if I were in the vigor of my strength and of my mind, how I would wish to fly to Oria to dedicate myself to this divine enterprise! But Divine Will needs my pettiness and misery!»<sup>66</sup>.

His tenacity nevertheless had to yield before the advancing illness: «the proofs of the first printing I will no longer see, but my loved ones will. And the preface? Alas! My head is not clear enough to dictate it! ... Yet the preface, if I can dictate it, will come out so simple and effective that it will impress even the highest personages of the Holy Church, including the Supreme Pontiff»<sup>67</sup>.

These souls influenced each other reciprocally, communicating treasures of grace and insights that the Lord had sown within them. Luisa Piccarreta drew from St. Annibale the zeal of the Rogate, the prayer for priests. Her writings repeatedly contain explicit references to this.

## 9. A BRIEF ANTHOLOGY OF THOUGHTS ON LUISA PICCARRETA

St Annibale held Luisa Piccarreta in great esteem, and he manifested this above all to the readers of the *L'Orologio della Passione*,

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<sup>64</sup> ID., *Letter to Luisa*, Messina, 24 March 191927, in *Raccolta*, p. 64.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>67</sup> DI FRANCA, *Letter to Luisa*, Messina, 24 March 1927, in *Raccolta*, pp. 63–64.

whose preface he wrote for the 1915 edition and revised in the subsequent ones<sup>68</sup>. Some synthetic characteristics:

*\* A dearest soul, daughter and disciple. She desires to live solitary, hidden and unknown.*

*\* The desire for hiddenness.*

«Under no circumstances would she have put in writing her intimate and prolonged communications with the adorable Jesus, from her earliest childhood to the present day, ... if our Lord himself had not repeatedly imposed it on her, both directly and through the holy obedience of her Directors, to which she always surrenders with immense violence against herself, and at the same time with great fortitude and generosity».

*\* The concept of obedience*

«This soul is in a tremendous struggle between a powerful overwhelming love of hiddenness and the inexorable dominion of Obedience, to which she must absolutely submit. And Obedience always prevails. This constitutes one of the most important traits of a true spirit, of a solid and proven virtue, since for about forty years, with the strongest violence against herself, she has subjected herself to the great Lady *who dominates her!*».

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<sup>68</sup> The first, dated Oria, 12 October 1926, in Scritti, vol. 40, doc. 5692; the second, reported in the publication *Le ventiquattro ore della Passione di N.S. Gesù Cristo*, published by the Luisa Piccarreta Association, Corato 1977, 232 pp., dated Messina, 29 October 1926, in *Scritti*, 40, doc. 5694.

**\* Identity of Luisa Piccarreta**

«This solitary soul is a most pure virgin, wholly of God, who appears as a singular object of predilection of the Divine Redeemer Jesus... seems to have wanted to make this virgin, whom He calls the littlest found upon Earth, deprived of all instruction, an instrument suited for a Mission so sublime that none other can be compared to it, namely the triumph of the Divine Will over the Whole Universe, in accordance with what is said in the *Pater Noster*: *fiat Voluntas tua, sicut in coelo et in terra*.

This virgin of the Lord, for more than 40 years, since she was still an adolescent, has been confined to bed as a victim of Divine Love. That bed has been the place of a long series of natural and supernatural sufferings, and of inebriations of the eternal charity of the Heart of Jesus. The origin of sufferings exceeding every order of nature has been almost continually an alternating privation of God, that which constitutes the dark night of the spirit, ...».

**\* The contextualisation of revelations**

«All these works of Divine Love take place for the most part in the silence of the night, and the following morning after Holy Communion, after which she remains withdrawn and recollected for a couple of hours. Added to the sufferings of the soul are those of the body, most of which are mystical in nature. Without any signs appearing on her hands, feet, side, or forehead, she receives from Our Lord Himself a frequent crucifixion. Jesus himself stretches her upon a cross and drives the nails. Here is another sign of the true spirit. Several times, when Our Lord appeared to her crowned with thorns, having first abstracted her from her senses, she, with graceful

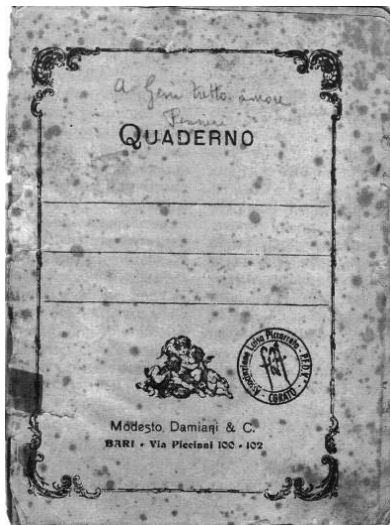
composure, removed the thorny crown from Him and placed it upon her own head, enduring atrocious pains yet receiving mystical consolations».

*\* Ecstasy and normality*

«This Bride of Jesus crucified, who spends the night in painful ecstasy and suffering of all kinds, when seen during the day seated upon her bed, working with needle and thread, reveals nothing, nothing at all of one who has suffered so much during the night, nothing, nothing of an air of extraordinary or supernatural. Instead, she appears in every respect to be healthy, cheerful, and even jovial. She speaks, converses, laughs when occasion requires, though she receives only a few friends. Sometimes a troubled heart confides in her and asks for prayers. She listens kindly, comforts, but never presumes to act as a prophetess, never utters a word that hints at revelations. The great comfort she offers is always, always the same subject: 'The Divine Will'. Although she possesses no human science, she is abundantly endowed with a wholly heavenly Wisdom, the Science of the Saints. Her words enlighten and console. By nature, she is not lacking in intelligence. Her studies, when she was a child, extended only up to the first class: her writing is full of errors, although she does not lack the appropriate terms in conformity with the Revelations, which Our Lord seems to instil in her».

In contrast, Luisa, in her numerous letters addressed to him, defines him thus: «Father of immense progeny, as you are to so many poor and abandoned little orphans whom you have gathered, indeed snatched away, at the cost of who knows how many sacrifices, from the clutches of Satan. May the blessed God bless you and preserve you for many years to come

for the affection of your dear orphans and all the sisters»<sup>69</sup>. «Blessed Jesus will reward your sacrifices. He knows how to pay well. His little coins are of immense and incalculable value, and blessed is he who, through sacrifices, fashions with God such treasures... but He also desires our readiness to sacrifice ourselves. Good payers need good connoisseurs...»<sup>70</sup>. «Jesus will not fail to reward your generosity»<sup>71</sup>.



«He recompenses you abundantly for the work of the *Orologio* and may it be one of the most beautiful gems that will shine upon your head»<sup>72</sup>.

And this was a true, authentic prophecy.

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<sup>69</sup> PICCARRETA, *Letter to Fr. Annibale*, Corato, 3 September 1916, in APR.

<sup>70</sup> ID., *Letter to Fr. Annibale*, Corato, 2 April 1917, in APR.

<sup>71</sup> ID., *Letter to Fr. Annibale*, Corato, 15 December 1920 (date of postmark). Due to a *lapsus calami*, Luisa wrote 15/4/1920.

<sup>72</sup> ID., *Letter to Fr. Annibale*, undated, probably from 1917. Don De Gennaro in the P.S. speaks of the holy visit of Monsignor Giovanni Regine, bishop of Trani from 1916 to 1918.

## 10. THE LAST SIX MONTHS OF ST. ANNIBALE'S LIFE IN 1927

They are accompanied by a significant correspondence with Luisa. In the General Postulation of the Rogationists, sixteen letters of Luisa are preserved. In Luisa's Postulation, instead, twenty-one letters sent by St. Annibale are found, dated between January 8 and May 15, 1927<sup>73</sup>.

Beyond the usual concerns tied to the revision of the writings and the printing to be undertaken, the correspondence of this final period documents the real state of health of the saint from Messina. «I am not in good health. I had to suspend the work of correcting the proofs just at the best point»<sup>74</sup>. «I am relieved, but still far from complete recovery... and even more so of my mind, which is much cast down, so that merely to think of the great labour of all these publications, I feel as though frightened by a mental impotence!»<sup>75</sup>.

Luisa had given him hope of recovery, above all that he might attend to the publication of the works of the Divine Will. St. Annibale is serene and fully aware: «It seems that the Lord wills it, both because He has given us all the writings, that is, the great deposit of His divine revelations, into our possession, and because of the particular lights the Lord has given me on how to regulate the publication, which before long you will see with the first fascicle now being printed in Oria; and also for the great means and machines that are needed, and the hands, and of all

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<sup>73</sup> See also reported in *Raccolta*, pp. 38-68.

<sup>74</sup> DI FRANCIA, *Letter to Luisa*, Messina, 24 January 1927 in n *Raccolta*, p. 43.

<sup>75</sup> ID., *Letter to Luisa*, Messina, 23 February 1927, in *Raccolta*, p. 51.

this the Lord has given us and continues to give us a singular abundance»<sup>76</sup>.

Di Francia's confidence is great when he asks for miraculous healing: «ask Our Lord with faith and love at least to obtain my miraculous healing. If you truly ask it of Jesus, He will not deny it to you. I beg this of you for the 19 volumes that lie closed in that archive of which I sent you the photograph, and for those upon which you are at work... In my mind I hold the entire design and unfolding of this magnificent publication»<sup>77</sup>.

The miracle did not come. St. Annibale died at dawn on June 1, 1927, at 6:30 a.m., in Contrada Guardia at Messina.

In volume 22 of her Diary (June 1, 1927), Luisa notes: «... I had received the unexpected news of the death of the Reverend Father Di Francia: he was the only one left to me to whom I could open my poor soul. How well he understood me; he was a saint to whom I entrusted myself and who had so deeply grasped the value of what Jesus had told me concerning the Divine Will; he was so interested that, with insistence, he had taken all the writings to publish them... I did not want to, and only because he was a saint did I have to yield»<sup>78</sup>.

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<sup>76</sup> ID., *Letter to Luisa*, Messina, 4 March 1927, in *Raccolta*, pp. 56-57.

<sup>77</sup> ID., *Letter to Luisa*, Messina, 14 April 1927, in *Raccolta*, pp. 66-67.

<sup>78</sup> Reported in *Luisa La Santa*, Bulletin edited by the Pia Associazione Luisa Piccarreta Piccoli Figli della Divina Volontà, year IX, no. 6 (July 1998), p. 2.



## 11. LUISA'S TESTIMONIES ABOUT ST. ANNIBALE

### *The death of St. Annibale*

«... I felt afflicted because I had received the unexpected news of the death of Rev. Father Di Francia. He was the only one left to me to whom I could open my poor soul. How well he understood me; he was a saint to whom I entrusted myself and who had so deeply grasped the value of what Jesus had told me concerning the Divine Will; he was so interested that, with insistence, he had taken all the writings to publish them... and my sweet Jesus: “My daughter, take courage, you must know that everything that soul, so dear to Me, has done, all the knowledge he acquired about My Will, so much more light did it enclose within his soul. That soul had every intention of putting it into practice, so much so that, seeing the great good that he felt, he wanted to make it known to others by publishing it. So, as long as he was on earth, the body, more than a wall, walled in that light; but no sooner had his soul gone forth from the prison of his body, than he found himself invested by the light he possessed, and by the many seeds of happiness, the effect of the knowledge of My Divine Will, which, as they developed, began to make him feel the beginning of the life of true beatitudes; and plunging into the eternal light of his Creator, he found himself in the Heavenly Homeland, where he will continue his mission on My Will, assisting everything from Heaven».

### *The vision of St. Annibale*

«I saw before me the blessed soul of Father Annibale M. Di Francia, near my bed, invested with light and suspended above the ground, looking at me fixedly but without saying a word. I too felt mute before him, and Jesus added: “Look at him, how he is transformed; My Will is light, and it

has transformed that soul into light; it is beautiful, it has given him all the shades of perfect beauty; it is holy, and he has remained sanctified; My Will possesses all sciences, and the soul has remained invested with the divine science; there is nothing that My Will has not given him". After this, I was thinking to myself: but why did blessed Jesus not concur in working the miracle for Father Di Francia? And Jesus said to me: "My daughter, the miracles that God Himself wills to be done are without any mixture of human will, they are perennial miracles... therefore I did not permit you to work the miracle of healing him, but you worked for him the great miracle of making him know My Will, and he departed from the earth with its possession, and now he enjoys himself in the ocean of the light of the Divine Will, and this is above all else"»<sup>79</sup>.

*The benefits of knowledge about the Divine Will*

«While I was searching for my sweet Jesus, I came upon Father Di Francia. He was all joyful, and he said to me: "Do you know how many beautiful surprises I have found? I did not believe it when I was on earth, although I thought I had done some good by publishing *L'Orologio della Passione*, but the surprises I have found are wonderful, enchanting, and of a rarity never before seen. All the words that concern the Passion of Our Lord have been changed into light, one more beautiful than the other, all interwoven among themselves, and these lights are always growing. As creatures do the Hours of the Passion, so other lights are added to the first ones. But what surprised me the most were the few sayings I published on

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<sup>79</sup> PICCARRETA, *Diario*, vol. 22, 1 June 1927.

the Divine Will. Each saying is changed into a sun, and as their rays invest all the lights, they form such a marvel of beauty that one remains enraptured, enchanted. You cannot imagine how surprised I was to find myself in the midst of these lights and these suns; how happy I was, and how I thanked our Supreme Good, Jesus, who had given me the occasion and the grace to do it” »<sup>80</sup>.

*The sacrifices of St. Annibale*

«I felt the sorrow of the Venerable Father Di Francia, who had made so many sacrifices, coming from afar, facing expenses for the publication, and just at the best point Jesus took him to Heaven. ... And do you think that the memory of Father Di Francia, his many sacrifices and his desires to make My Will known, even to the point of beginning the publication, only because I took him to Heaven, will his memory be extinguished in this great work of My Divine Fiat? No, no! On the contrary, he will hold the first place, because by coming from afar he went as though in search of the most precious thing that can exist in Heaven and on earth, and of the act that glorifies Me the most; he will give Me complete glory on the part of creatures, and they will receive complete goods. He prepared the ground so that My Divine Will might be known, so true is it that he spared nothing, neither expenses nor sacrifices, and although the publication did not reach its completion, by merely beginning it he prepared the ways so that one day it could be known, and the work of My Will could have life in the midst of creatures.

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<sup>80</sup> ID., *Diario*, vol. 22, 17 June 1927.

Who could ever destroy the fact that Father Di Francia was the first initiator of making the Kingdom of My Will known? And only because his life was extinguished, did the publication not reach its completion? Therefore, when this great work will be known, his name, his memory, will be full of glory and splendour, and he will hold his first act in a work so great, both in Heaven and on earth. For he took the writings with him in order to publish them; had this not been so, who would have spoken of them? No one! And if he had not made others understand the importance, the great good of these writings, no one would have taken an interest in them... My daughter, Father Di Francia will be said to have been the first propagator...»<sup>81</sup>.

## **12. THE HOUSE OF THE DAUGHTERS OF DIVINE ZEAL IN CORATO**

The Antonian Institute of the Sisters of the Divine Zeal in Corato remains a sign and a living memory of the relationship that endured for about seventeen years between St. Annibale M. Di Francia and Luisa Piccarreta. Since 1915, St. Annibale had repeatedly invited Luisa to move into one of his women's Institutes, perhaps in the nearby city of Trani, to be «a teacher of virtue and of the Divine Will to his sisters and orphan girls», offering them instruction and counsel. He considered the presence of the mystic from Corato a true blessing.

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<sup>81</sup> ID., *Diario*, vol. 23, 28 February 1928.

**DIO E IL PROSSIMO**  
BOLLETTINO DELLE DUE ASSOCIAZIONI - TRIO ORFANI

**Novello Orfanotrofo Antoniano Femminile  
in Corato (Bari).**

Il nostro venerato Fondatore, Ca-  
scando Annibale M. Di Francia, al-  
quando tempo prima di morire, affi-  
dò ai suoi figli e figlie il compito di  
scrivere un nuovo saluto di carità per le  
Orfanelle Antoniane in Corato (Bari).  
Ed eccoci, ubbidienti al volere di Lui,  
pionieri a inaugurarlo. Il booklet ebbe  
vessuto un grandioso progetto, ma  
per ora se n'è fabbricato solo una par-  
te, senza la Chiesa, che si erigeva  
quando placava alla Divina Provvi-  
denza. Oggi vi è quanto basta a rac-  
cogliere un certo numero di bambine  
senza padre e senza madre, né voi  
grandi né più piccole di anni quattro  
fino d'età. Sarà un vero vivaio di  
figli del buon Dio, ombreggiato dal  
solo del dolore dell'orfantità, ma che  
sen le loro preghiere, profumate di  
innocenza, fanno ogni giorno dol-  
ce violenza al Bambinello Gesù, per-  
ché conceda a S. Antonio di Padova,  
suo protettore, tutte le grazie, che  
i Devoti gli chiedono per mezzo del-  
le loro prece.

Ecco dunque un altro Orfanotrofo  
Antoniano, su cui si poserà proprio  
l'occhio misericordioso di Dio e del  
grande Tauernstergo di Padova! Vol-  
rete cui dunque ancora voi, o Devoti  
Antoniani, lo sguardo di vostra fede,

da vicino e da lontano, e vi si accen-  
derà, anche per voi, il sacro fuoco  
di carità; e voi, o Devoti, se da un  
lato sarete i beneficati per le grazie  
ottenute per mezzo delle preghiere del-  
le Orfanelle, dall'altro sarete anche i  
benefattori, per l'obolo, che loro man-  
derete per le grazie ottenute o sperate  
dal gran Signore.

E mentre lo nostro Signore si lancia-  
no a fare per loro le parti dei genit-  
tori, che esse perlettero voi le assiste-  
rete, col contributo di vostra carità,  
a strappare all'abbandono e ai peri-  
coli tanto esistenza, che, anche per  
vostro merito, contribuiranno a mi-  
gliorare le sorti della Società.

Il Signore illumini voi, noi e le  
nostre care Orfanelle; affinché ognun-  
no dei nostri cari Devoti entri, insie-  
me a noi, nel seno dell'Adorabile Di-  
vina Volontà, alla quale questa Casa  
intendiamo offrire, dedicare, intitolare!

Per richiedere le unali preghiere  
delle nuove Orfanelle Antoniane, per  
grazie che uno aspetta, rivolgersi:

Alla Rev. da Superiora  
delle Orfanelle Antoniane  
Casa Divina Volontà - Via Fiume  
(Bari)  
CORATO

But although Luisa did not dislike the idea of being with the sisters, she had never decided to leave Corato, unless «a religious house should arise in Corato»<sup>82</sup>, whose inhabitants would be «a little army of souls» and «little daughters of the Divine Will»<sup>83</sup>.

Before this openness, St. Annibale began to cultivate the idea of opening a women's Institute in Corato, seeking a suitable piece of land to purchase. The correspondence between the two souls shows many stages of this idea and of the journey that would eventually lead to its foundation. Some difficulties arose, even though Don Gennaro De Gennaro, Luisa's

official confessor at that time, desired it greatly: «I would like the divine inspiration that calls you to Corato to found a House to become a reality before I leave this world»<sup>84</sup>. In 1920, Luisa urged St. Annibale to buy the

<sup>82</sup> See LUIGI D'ORIA (ed.), *Appunti biografici di Luisa Piccarreta*, 1951. He was Spiritual Father at the Seminary of Molfetta and Vicar General of the Diocese of Trani.

<sup>83</sup> PICCARRETA, *Letter to Fr. Annibale*, Corato, 27 December 1920 in APR. The letter from Fr. Annibale sent in the meantime is missing.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibidem*.

land: there was, in fact, an offer of a plot for sale, mediated by Don Vincenzo Piccarreta, who was awaiting a reply.

She also had in mind something more than a simple community of sisters, outlining the “spiritual programme of the little army of souls”, an intimate and personal experience open to fraternity, so that what Jesus had accomplished in her might be repeated in others, seeing in this her mission before the end of her life<sup>85</sup>.

The holy canon from Messina not only wished to open a women’s religious House in Corato but also desired that Luisa be a guest there with her sister Angelina, among his sisters. Faced with this desire, Luisa demurred: «To do it exclusively for me, no, I do not deserve so much. That your paternal goodness wants to do this great work for our town is a supreme good, because truly there is lacking a place of refuge for poor young girls, and who knows how many religious vocations will come forth? So, if the Lord wants you to do the work, everything is fine, but as for me, you must leave me aside. ... My sister and I could not move into the new house until your sisters arrive, for Jesus will have taken complete possession of the holy place. Because it is a little far from the centre of the town, the priest would not feel comfortable coming all the way there for us alone, especially since the present confessor is half-ill and therefore would certainly not come, and I would have to remain fasting without my Jesus. This is the only reason we cannot go until everything is completed. ... If Jesus gives me the bread to nourish His children, I will gladly give it to all;

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<sup>85</sup> PICCARRETA, *Letter to Fr. Annibale*, Corato, 22 January 1921, in APR.

if not, I will fast with them, and then the Sisters must instruct me, not I them, is it not true. After all, it is His Will that matters most to me and lies closest to my heart; everything else, for me, is nothing»<sup>86</sup>.

Luisa's difficulties in leaving her home at Via Ospedale Vecchio 14 continued even after the hydrogeological disaster that struck Corato in 1922, after which St. Annibale and the Mother Superior of Trani warmly invited her to move to the Institute in Trani<sup>87</sup>.

Meanwhile, the unmarried Cimadomo sisters<sup>88</sup> of Corato, knowing of St. Annibale's intention to open a religious House in order also to facilitate Luisa's transfer into it, and being landowners with several large estates, had come to the decision to donate to St. Annibale, under the form of a simulated sale<sup>89</sup> in all legal forms, «a piece of arable land situated in the suburban countryside of Corato, [in Via Murge], bordering other

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<sup>86</sup> ID., *Letter to Fr. Annibale*, Corato, 15 December 1920, in APR.

<sup>87</sup> ID., *Letter to Fr. Annibale*, Corato, 8 May 1922, in APR.

<sup>88</sup> Despite the difficulties associated with her revelations, the Cimadomo family remained loyal to Luisa even in 1938, when she was condemned by the Holy Office: as if nothing had happened, they continued to support and visit Luisa. The turmoil caused by this decision was felt more in public opinion than by Luisa herself. In churches, by order from above, it was clearly stated that Luisa was a visionary and should not be followed or frequented, under penalty of excommunication. This caused great impression, dismay and malicious gossip throughout Corato and the surrounding area. Many people distanced themselves from Luisa.

<sup>89</sup> See the deed of sale, a copy of which is kept in the Archives of the Daughters of Divine Zeal in Corato.

properties belonging to various owners...»<sup>90</sup>. Luisa urged the beginning of the work for the house to be built: «My good friends ... have completed all the paperwork, they have ordered the tenants to vacate, and they are waiting for your word that you will set your hand to the work next September»<sup>91</sup>.

In 1925, the purchase of the land for the new foundation was finally achieved, a foundation<sup>92</sup>, in which privileged hospitality would also be offered to Luisa Piccarreta and her sister, now discouraged by the threefold increase in the rent of their home. The bureaucratic procedures and the acquisition of the land were carried out by Father Pantaleone Palma, his brother Pietro, and their two sisters Teresa and Giacinta<sup>93</sup>, persons in whom St. Annibale placed complete trust.

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<sup>90</sup> The deed was written in Corato at Luisa Piccarreta's home at Via Ospedale Vecchio 14 by Notary Michele Abbruzzese on 14 October 1925 and registered in Corato on 2 November 1925.

<sup>91</sup> PICCARRETA, *Letter to Fr. Annibale*, Corato, 7 December 1924, in APR.

<sup>92</sup> DI FRANCIA, *Letter to Mother Nazarena Majone of the Daughters of Divine Zeal*, Oria, 30 September 1925, in *Scritti*, 36, p. 131. Mother Nazarena Majone (Graniti, Me, 21 June 1869, Rome 25 January 1939), first Superior General of the Daughters of Divine Zeal until 1928. See A. SARDONE, *La Figlia del Divino Zelo nel cammino di 100 anni. Tracciato storico dell'identità carismatica e dell'azione apostolica della Congregazione delle Suore Figlie del Divino Zelo*, in "Vita Nostra", XLIII, 1987, no. 5, pp. 895-952. The process of beatification is underway and she has been *venerable* since 2003.

<sup>93</sup> In Rogationist history, donations and sales were often made in their name, since St. Annibale had great trust in them and Fr. Pantaleone Palma was the administrator.

In the «*Memoriale dei Divini Benefici*» for the year 1925, a kind of internal diary of the Rogationist Work in which he recorded the most important events, not only of a spiritual nature, St. Annibale writes: «On 14 October 1925, by public act before Notary Abbruzzese, the Misses Cimadomo ceded to the Work, represented by the siblings Father Pantaleone Palma, Giacinta, Pietro, and Teresa, approximately 8,000 square metres of land in Corato (Bari), Via Murge, to build one of our Antonian Institutes there, and the cession was entirely gratuitous». The expenses were borne by St. Annibale, who sent a money order of 10,000 lire!<sup>94</sup> He would always remain grateful to the Cimadomo sisters: «Our Lord will give them a great reward for the pious donation they have made of that land, so that a house of salvation for many souls may be raised there»<sup>95</sup>. To follow the procedures and the progress of the construction<sup>96</sup>, as in other circumstances, Father Palma and Sister Paracleta Antonuccio, who in 1926 was the superior of the House of Trani, were explicitly appointed. St. Annibale himself, however, once he had received the approval of Archbishop Mons. Leo, wished to see personally the progress of the entire

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<sup>94</sup> «I also let you know that I have with me ten thousand lire, which you sent me, and another ten thousand lire that the Superior of Trani brought me when she came with Father Palma. I wanted to give it to the confessor, but he did not want to accept it; I wanted to give it to Father Palma, and he did not want it either. He told me that for now I should keep it, and that when the Work in Corato begins, he will find it ready» LUISA PICCARRETA, *Letter to Fr. Annibale*, Corato, 2 February 1926, in APR.

<sup>95</sup> See DI FRANCIA, *Letter to Luisa*, Messina, 8 January 1927, in *Raccolta*, p. 41.

<sup>96</sup> ID., *Letter to Luisa*, Trani, 30 August 1926, in *Raccolta*, pp. 18-19.

situation<sup>97</sup>. He therefore went to Corato and remained there for several days<sup>98</sup>.

The necessary funds began to be collected. Luisa herself took part in this effort. The work finally began, despite various obstacles. The disorientation experienced at the death of St. Annibale, and the election of the new General Council of the Daughters of Divine Zeal, delayed the construction of the House and increased the concerns of Father Palma within the Rogationist Work, already burdened by its administrative and economic responsibilities.

The General Council of the Daughters of Divine Zeal, for the foundation of the House in Corato, established a new Community composed of the Superior, Sister Cecilia Colaianni<sup>99</sup>, Sister Salome Sidoti<sup>100</sup>, Sister M. Dolorosa Casiello<sup>101</sup>, Sister Salette Pastore<sup>102</sup> and Sister Gioacchina<sup>103</sup>. To them would be added nine orphan girls and one postulant.

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<sup>97</sup> ID., *Letter to Fr. Francesco Bonaventura Vitale of the Rogationists*, Oria, 3 August 1926, in APR.

<sup>98</sup> ID., *Letter to Fr. Francesco Bonaventura Vitale*, Corato, 12 August 1926, in APR.

<sup>99</sup> Sister Cecilia Colaianni (Calascibetta, En, 1 November 1887 - Messina, 1 January 1966). See «Profili delle Consorelle defunte», *Figlie del Divino Zelo 1939-1966*, 2, pp. 209-210.

<sup>100</sup> Sister Salome Sidoti (Montalbano d'Elicona, Me, 19 May 1894 - Trani 28 October 1953). See «Profiles of Deceased Sisters», *Daughters of Divine Zeal*, 2, pp. 120-122.

<sup>101</sup> Sister Dolorosa Casiello (Altamura, 4 May 1896 - Oria, 24 March 1981). See «Profiles of Deceased Sisters», *Daughters of Divine Zeal 1967-1981*, 3, pp. 209-210.

<sup>102</sup> Sister Salette Pastore (Corato, 12 July 1900 - Oria, 21 November 1975). See «Profiles of Deceased Sisters», 3, pp. 113-115.

Father Palma personally oversaw the immediate preparation of the sisters for the foundation<sup>104</sup>, as well as the postulant and the nine orphan girls, in the nearby House of Trani, on Saturday, 6 October<sup>105</sup>.



The House was inaugurated on 7 October 1928 by Monsignor Giuseppe Maria Leo and consecrated by Father Pantaleone Palma to the *Divine Will*, according to the design and explicit desire of St. Annibale.

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<sup>103</sup> Sister Gioacchina De Palma (Bovino, Fg, 12 May 1901 - Oria 17 January 1985). See «Profiles of Deceased Sisters», *Daughters of Divine Zeal* 1982-1992, 4, pp. 66-67.

<sup>104</sup> They arrived in Trani on 2 October. On the same day, Mother General Sr. M. Cristina and Secretary General Sr. Ignazia Palmieri left Rome. See «Bulletin of the Evangelical Rogation of the Heart of Jesus», year VII, no. 6 (November-December) 1928, p. 103.

<sup>105</sup> See *Storia della Casa di Corato*, 6 October 1928. See also the report in the «Bulletin of the Evangelical Rogation of the Heart of Jesus», year VII (VI) no. 6 (November-December) 1928, pp. 103-104. They left with one car and two carts. See also «Bollettino della Rogazione Evangelica del Cuore di Gesù», year VII, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

### 13. LUISA IN THE HOUSE OF THE DIVINE WILL

On the very day of the opening, carrying out the intention of the holy Founder, the Superior General of the Daughters of Divine Zeal, Sister Cristina Figura<sup>106</sup> wanted Luisa Piccarreta to enter the Institute to live there permanently. She herself went to pick her up from her home in Via Ospedale Vecchio, together with some sisters of the Council and Sister Cecilia Colaianni, the superior of the newly established House. Luisa entered accompanied by Don Benedetto Calvi and was placed in a room adjoining the sacramental chapel: from there she could follow the celebration of Holy Mass and see clearly the altar and the tabernacle. Her sister Angelina was placed in a nearby room.



**Mother Cristina Figura**

In her *Diary*, Luisa recounts her emotions at the opening of the new religious House and her move there: «As this House was about to open, there were people, Sisters, little girls, a coming and going of everyone, all in movement. I felt very impressed, and my sweet Jesus, stirring within me,

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<sup>106</sup> Mother Cristina Figura (Caltagirone, Catania, 27 March 1886 – Taormina, Messina, 14 January 1943). See *Profiles of the Deceased Sisters, Daughters of Divine Zeal*, vol. 2, pp. 57–59. She was an assiduous and faithful collaborator of Father Palma in the organization of the Antonian Secretariats, Superior in various Houses, and Superior General of the Daughters of Divine Zeal from 1928 to 10 September 1932.

said to me: "My daughter, this group of people you see, all in movement for the opening of the House of my Divine Will, is a symbol of that group of people who were there when I wished to be born in Bethlehem... I recognize in this group of people, of little girls and of Sisters, the beginning of the kingdom of my Divine Will." It was eight o'clock in the evening, and unusually the Confessor came. At the request of the Reverend Mother Superior, he imposed on me, by obedience, that I should give in and satisfy the Superior. I resisted somewhat, because I thought that if the Lord had wanted it in April, the warmer season, then I would have considered it. But the Confessor insisted so much that I had to give in. And so, around half past nine in the evening, I was brought to this House, near my prisoner Jesus. This is the little story of how I came to be in the House of the Divine Will ».

Meanwhile, the Archbishop had appointed Don Benedetto Calvi, Luisa's ordinary chaplain, also as chaplain of the Sisters of the Divine Zeal. Luisa was made a participant in the events of the life of the religious Community. However, difficulties were not lacking, arising from some misunderstandings and from the constant coming and going of people who wished to see her, something that did not easily harmonize with community life, marked as it was by schedules and disciplinary rules.

Luisa's stay in the Institute lasted until 15 October 1938, a full ten years. To avoid negative repercussions for the religious Community due to the Decree of the Holy Office concerning her Writings, Luisa decided to leave the Institute and move to Via Maddalena 20, near the home of her confessor, Don Benedetto Calvi.

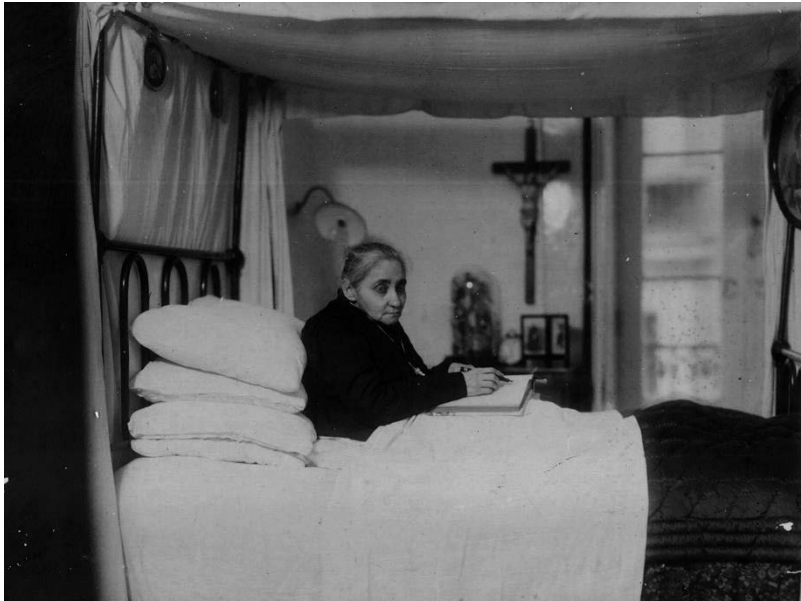
**Luisa in the internal courtyard  
of the girls' orphanage in Corato**



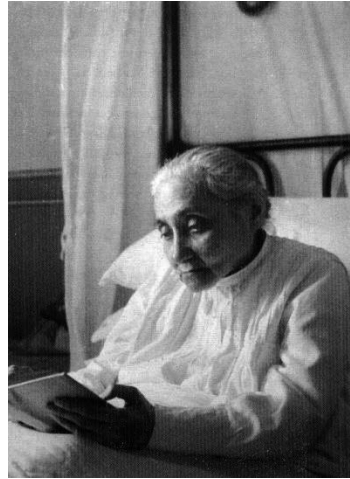
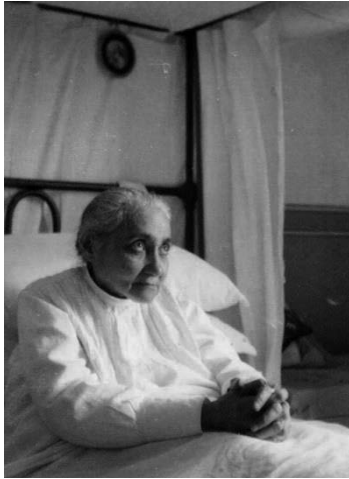


#### **14. THE LAST PART OF LUISA'S LIFE**

In the house on Via Maddalena, Luisa lived with her sister Angelina for another 9 years, earning her living, as she had always done, by making lace. Many young girls learned this noble art from her. Several priests and ordinary people visited her, while she remained confined to her bed, without ever developing bedsores.







A sudden bout of bronchitis proved fatal to her health in just fifteen days: she died at 6 o'clock in the morning on 4 March 1947. She remained on her bed for four days, seated as she had been for almost the entirety of her life. A special coffin was made to accommodate her seated position, with a glass panel on the upper part of the lid so that she could be seen.

The funeral was held on 7 March and was a triumph. She was buried in the private chapel of the Calvi family. In 1963, her mortal remains were transferred to the church of Santa Maria Greca, where they still rest in a simple sarcophagus located in the small right-hand side chapel, facing the altar.











**Exhumation of her mortal remains and transfer  
to the Church of Santa Maria Greca in 1963**

On 25 February 1994, Archbishop Carmelo Cassati<sup>107</sup> initiated the diocesan inquiry for her beatification and canonization. Archbishop Giovanni Battista Pichierri<sup>108</sup> closed it on 29 October 2005, sending the acts to Rome to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.



**Msgr. Carmelo Cassati**



**Msgr. G. Battista Pichierri**

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<sup>107</sup> Mons. Carmelo Cassati (Sant'Eufemia, Lecce, 6 April 1924 - Tricase, Lecce, 3 February 2017). He belonged to the Congregation of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and served as a missionary in Pinheiro, Brazil. In 1979 he returned to Italy for health reasons and was assigned to the Diocese of Tricarico until 7 September 1985; he then became bishop of the Dioceses of Lucera and San Severo, and finally, in 1990, he was elevated to Archbishop of Trani-Barletta-Bisceglie.

<sup>108</sup> Mons. Giovan Battista Pichierri (Sava, Taranto, 12 February 1943 - Trani, 26 July 2017). He was elected to the episcopal see of Cerignola-Ascoli Satriano on 21 December 1990 and promoted to Archbishop of Trani-Barletta-Bisceglie on 13 November 1999.

## 15. CONCLUSION

The presence of St. Annibale M. Di Francia in the life and work of Luisa Piccarreta, their mutual trust, his episcopal appointment as ecclesiastical examiner of her writings, and his constant service in accompanying her and guiding her spiritually, dispelled many doubts arising from the difficulty of understanding and the mysterious nature of this woman whom ordinary people called *Luisa the saint*.

The great regard that St. Annibale had for this woman, and above all for the spirituality of the Divine Will, «*a sublime and heavenly doctrine, a sublime and divine science, although I do not fully understand it due to the limitations of my intelligence*» together with the awareness of feeling «*a great divine assistance in penetrating the spirit of these writings and coordinating them for the purposes of the Divine Will*» is a fact, and a precious legacy left also to the Rogationists and the Daughters of Divine Zeal, as well as to the many admirers and devotees of Luisa Piccarreta throughout the world. It is almost a guarantee enabling one to approach her writings without hesitation and to savour the *sublimity* of their thought.

The memory of Luisa Piccarreta lives on in the *House of the Divine Will* in Corato. Next to the chapel, a small museum has been set up in which relics and writings belonging to the Apulian mystic are displayed.

The spirituality of the *Divine Will*, the charism of Luisa Piccarreta, has spread widely in many parts of the world since her death, by paths known only to mystery. Numerous groups refer to it, and thousands of adherents read and comment on her writings, showing a great and contagious enthusiasm. Several of us Rogationists have personally verified the truth of these affirmations in many parts of the world.

The members of the *Association of the Divine Will* themselves affirm that a sure reception of this spirituality, and a certain guarantee, comes from knowledge of the life and work of St. Annibale, from his writings, and from his spirituality.

The support that Luisa Piccarreta and Annibale Di Francia gave each other in life continues even now, as they fully enjoy the beatific vision of God in the perfect fulfilment of his *Divine Will*. For this reason, and in light of what is affirmed in the writings themselves, the title *Apostle of the Divine Will* may rightly be applied to the holy canon from Messina.



## APPENDIX

### 1. Luisa Piccarreta's bishops

Giuseppe de Bianchi Dottula	(1848-1892)
Domenico Marinangeli	(1893-1898)
Tommaso De Stefano	(1898-1906)
Francesco Paolo Carrano	(1906-1915)
Giovanni Regine	(1915-1918)
Eugenio Tosi	(1918-1920)
Giuseppe M. Leo	(1920-1939)

He gave the Imprimatur to the writings examined by St. Annibale from volumes 1 to 19, following his *Nulla Osta*.

### 2. Luisa Piccarreta's confessors

Don Michele De Benedictis	(from 1888 to 1898)
Canon Don Gennaro De Gennaro	(from 1898 to 1922) <sup>109</sup>

In 1899 he imposed on Luisa that she begin to write scrupulously everything that God was working in her: her intimate relations with Him, and all the heavenly graces and favours with which her soul had been enriched since her childhood.

Canon Don Francesco De Benedictis	(from 1922 to 1926)
Don Benedetto Calvi	(from 1926 to 1947)
St. Annibale Maria Di Francia	(from 1910 to 1927)

He served as extraordinary confessor and censor of writings.

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<sup>109</sup> Luisa reports this in a letter dated 26 March 1922. As usual, the Father Annibale wrote on the envelope: *Announces the death of De Gennaro*.

### 3. The Universal Pious Union of the Children of the Divine Will

St. Annibale set his hand to «a little work of the Divine Will, a universal spiritual Pious Union, entitled the “Children of the Divine Will”. It will be established in the simplest manner. There will be no registers, no regulations, no meetings, no payments, no obligations of conscience. We shall print, with the help of the Lord, hundreds of thousands of leaflets, on which will be the recitation of the chaplet of the Divine Will, formed in two parts... This Pious Union I shall present, with ecclesiastical approval, to the Sacred Congregation of Indulgences in Rome, and I hope to have it enriched with holy indulgences. It will serve to spread throughout the world the publications and the knowledge of the revelations of the Divine Will... These leaflets will be translated into many languages and diffused in many nations»<sup>110</sup>.

It is not a question of houses being formed in the world of nuns dedicated as Daughters of the Divine Will... «but all religious houses of men and women, and all secular classes, and any person throughout the world, can become a son or daughter of the Divine Will by simply accepting the Leaflet... There will be no registration forms, no regulations, but zealous men and women to distribute the Leaflets»<sup>111</sup>.

It will be established in a very simple way. There will be no registers, no regulations, no meetings, no payments, no obligations of conscience. With the Lord's help, we will print hundreds of thousands of Leaflets, which will contain the recitation of the chaplet of the Divine Will,

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<sup>110</sup> DI FRANCIA, *Letter to Luisa*, Messina, 23 February 1927, in *Raccolta*, pp. 50-51.

<sup>111</sup> ID., *Letter to Luisa*, Messina, 4 March 1927, in *Raccolta*, pp. 57-58.

consisting of two parts taken from the Pater Noster, namely: *Fiat, Domine, Voluntas tua Sicut in Coelo et in Terra. Amen.*

The recitation of the Pater, Ave and Gloria is preceded. After 10 recitations, either alone or in common, there is the Gloria Patri, and so on for 5 posts, and then as much as you want. In the Report Leaflet there will be many other little things specified about the Kingdom of the Divine Will and its Children.

The five times end as follows:

*Lord Jesus, we praise you, we love you, we bless you and we thank you, God with the Father and with the Holy Spirit in your Holy and Eternal Divine Will. Amen.*

I will present this Pious Union, with ecclesiastical approval, to the Sacred Congregation of Indulgences in Rome, and I hope to enrich it with holy Indulgences. It will serve to spread throughout the world the publications and knowledge of the revelations of the Divine Will. Since this Pious Union has no special rules, anyone of any class or status may belong to it: men, women, religious, secular, etc.

I did not conceive of **the Universal Pious Union of the Children of the Divine Will** in the world as you understand it, that is, with many houses to be established throughout the world for sisters dedicated as Daughters of the Divine Will. In this way, the institution would not be universal, nor could it develop rapidly. As I conceived it, all religious houses of men and women, and all secular classes, and any person throughout the world, can become a son or daughter of the Divine Will by simply accepting the Leaflet, reciting every day, without obligation of conscience, 5 posts of the ejaculation: "Fiat, domine, Voluntas tua Sicut in Coelo, Amen", alternating it with the Gloria Patri, and preceded by an Our

Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be. There will be no registration lists or regulations, but zealous men and women to distribute the Leaflets. As for our House in Corato, it is understood that our Sisters and all internal and external staff will be Daughters of the Divine Will»<sup>112</sup>.



**Luisa's tomb in the right chapel in Santa Maria Greca**

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<sup>112</sup> ID., *Letter to Luisa Piccarreta*, Messina, 4 March 1927, in *Raccolta*, p. 56.

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